

**THE PROPOSED TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY BILL DEBATE IN MALAWI:  
A RE-READING OF MARK 5:25-34**

By

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## **DECLARATION**

In accordance with the University regulations, I hereby state unambiguously that this work has not been presented at any other University or any other institution of higher learning other than the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg Campus), and that unless specifically indicated to the contrary within the text, it is my original work.

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**14 December 2018**

As candidate supervisor I hereby approve this thesis for submission

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**DR WILHELM MEYER**

**14 December 2018**

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# **DEDICATION**

TO

My mother, Estella Lonjezo Chisa who sadly passed away just before completing her Master's Degree in 2011. You were and always will be a source of inspiration. I thank GOD for helping me through my studies.

# **ABSTRACT AND KEY TERMS**

## **Abstract**

This paper has three main focus points using the Tripolar method of biblical hermeneutics as a frame. Firstly, it analyses the context of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi. This has involved a presentation of arguments in response to this bill from political, medical and religious spheres. This paper has identified flaws in the law-based approach to termination of pregnancy and has argued for public healthcare and reproductive justice as alternative approaches. Religious responses towards termination of pregnancy – which are based on biblical texts – have been critiqued using African feminist biblical hermeneutics, the theoretical framework of this paper.

Secondly, this paper has focuses on the biblical text of Mark 5:25-34. In this regard, it discusses feminist readings of this text. The character of the woman in this text has been used as a source for encouragement for women struggling for voices and choices on matters concerning termination of pregnancy in Malawi. The woman in this text has been identifies in terms of her actions (initiative) and not her condition in this case. Mark 5:25-34 has been analysed literary using the narrative elements that this text presents.

Thirdly, this paper suggests ideo-theological resources for engaging with the termination of pregnancy discourse in Malawi. It identifies African feminist biblical hermeneutics and narrative method as ideo-theological resources for this context. Contextual Bible Study and a rap song have been suggested as further resources of appropriation for empowerment, liberation and education through the biblical text of Mark 5:25-34. Overall, the arguments made in this paper are geared towards helping women to have a voice in the termination of pregnancy discourse in Malawi.

## **Key Terms**

Women, African Feminist, Biblical Hermeneutics, Termination of Pregnancy, Ideo-theological Resources.

## **ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

AFBH	African Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics
CBS	Contextual Bible Study
CJS	Centre for Solutions Journalism
CMDF	Christian Medical Dental Fellowship
EAM	Evangelical Association of Malawi
ICWRSA	International Campaign for Women's Rights to Safe Abortion
MCC	Malawi Council of Churches
MoH	Ministry of Health
NIV	New International Version
PCFIB	Post-colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1. Introduction**

The termination of pregnancy discourse in Malawi, the biblical text of Mark 5:25-34 and African feminist biblical hermeneutics are the focus points of this paper. This opening chapter sets out these focus points. To give some context, the section that follows provides the background of the research problem of this study. The termination of pregnancy debate in Malawi, Mark 5:25-34 and African feminist biblical hermeneutics will be introduced through the Tripolar method of biblical hermeneutics. Questions that this paper will attempt to answer and an outline of the chapters that follow in this paper will be discussed in the end.

### **1.2. Background to the Research Problem**

Early in 2018, I was reading through some news headlines on line in order to keep in touch with what was going on in my home country of Malawi. This led me to news about the reformation of the abortion law in Malawi. The Nation Online, is an online version of one of the leading newspapers in Malawi. I have since been following reports on the reformation of the abortion law in Malawi on this news platform and others. This has served as one of the basis for this research paper.

In 2015, the Law Commission of Malawi drafted a Termination of Pregnancy Bill (Mkandawire, 2016). This was prompted by a study conducted by the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Malawi (Mkandawire, 2016). The study revealed that about 70000 girls and women get involved in unsafe abortions every year in Malawi and about 31000 end up in “complications which result in disabilities, infertility and death of 17 women and girls out of every 200 dying of pregnancy-related conditions” (Mkandawire, 2016).

Upon hearing about the draft for the termination of pregnancy bill, some religious faith communities led the public into protests against the proposed bill in December, 2016 (Mkandawire, 2016). While some Churches have publicly supported the proposed termination of pregnancy bill, others have publicly opposed leading to confusion around this issue (Matonga, 2016).

### **1.3. The Tri-polar Method of Biblical Hermeneutics**

The Tri-polar method is an intersection of three poles – “the African context, the biblical text, and the ideo-theological forms of dialogue between African context and biblical text” (West, 2016). Therefore, this paper focuses on the context of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi, the biblical text of Mark 5:25-34 and African feminist biblical hermeneutics as an ideo-theological form of dialogue between the context and the text. This paper is designed through this framework. Firstly, it provides the context of the debate and then uses African feminist biblical hermeneutics as a critique to some of the responses and ways in which scripture has been used in this debate. Secondly, it uses a biblical text as a tool for empowerment and liberation of women in this context. Thirdly, it suggests ideo-theological resources that can be used through the biblical text in order to engage with this context. I will now discuss the three poles of the Tripolar method – context, biblical text and ideo-theological forms of dialogue – in relation to this study.

#### **1.3.1. The Context of the Proposed Termination of Pregnancy Bill in Malawi**

As pointed out in the background of this paper, there is an ongoing debate around a proposed termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi. In this respect, some of the information around the debate in this paper has been drawn from The Nation (Online) – one of the leading news papers in Malawi – which has closely followed the issue. The other source of information with regard to this context is the Malawi Penal Code. This helps with understanding the current status of the law of abortion in Malawi. The proposed termination of pregnancy bill has also been outlined in order to provide a picture of where the abortion law in Malawi is shifting as far as law reformation is concerned. A Sexual Reproductive Health policy document, published in

2017 by the Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM) has also been engaged with. This policy document serves as one of the examples on the stance of religious groups around the issue of issue of termination of pregnancy.

### **1.3.2. The Biblical Text of Mark 5:25-34**

In terms of biblical text, this paper uses Mark 5:25-34 (NIV). It says:

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

A literary analysis method will be used in my process of reading this text.

This text is being re-read with special focus on the character of the woman in this narrative. This will be done in order to encourage and empower women in cases where laws and religious doctrines limit them from having voices and making choices on matters concerning termination of pregnancy in Malawi. It is important to note in this regard that this paper identifies the woman in the narrative by her actions (initiative) and not her condition. This involves calling her "woman" and not "the hemorrhaging woman."

Reading in the African context, Musa Dube (2001:5) points out that, African women choose to believe that the woman in this text has been granted freedom to exercise freedom of choice. This text according to Dube (2001:6):

Offers a model of transforming power, which calls for the active involvement of the powerless and the powerful... it suggests that the powerful and the powerless must work together to redistribute power, to share it and to use it positively.

On top of locating the bleeding woman in Mark 5:25-34 in the African context, Dube portrays the woman as one who is wholly involved in the quest to find healing and survival (Dube, 2009). This helps regarding the urgent need to reform the termination of pregnancy law in Malawi. Reforming the law ensures that not many women lose their lives through unsafe abortion; it enables them to gain access to proper health care which possibly reduces women's unsafe abortion mortality rate.

In this sense, this paper argues that women need not to be excluded from engagement of issues that affect their bodies and lives. This is a feature of transformative biblical hermeneutics which is about reading and interpreting the Bible in ways "whereby women can be empowered to become agents of self-actualization in their worlds" (Dube 2001:12).

### **1.3.3. Ideo-theological Forms of Dialogue**

According to Gerald West, "the ideo-theological pole can take various forms... the third pole offers an important starting point in understanding the different emphases in African biblical hermeneutics" (West, 2016). This third pole – also known as appropriation – brings clarity to how the poles of the African context and the biblical text engage each other (West, 2016).

Thus, ideo-theological forms of dialogue serve as theoretical resources for engaging different issues in particular contexts. Nirmala Vasanthakumar (1997:44) points out that one of the duties of hermeneutics is to bring the biblical text and its context and what it says in contemporary contexts into conversation. This dialogical engagement between the biblical text and our context therefore helps in terms of finding God's word for our context (Vasanthakumar 1997:44).

#### **1.4. Theoretical Framework**

This paper uses African feminist biblical hermeneutics as a theoretical framework. In this approach, the African context is the centre of biblical interpretation, this means that everything in the process of interpretation is influenced by the world-view and life experience of that African context (West, 2016). According to David Adamo (2015):

It is the re-reading of the Christian scripture from a premeditatedly Afrocentric perspective. Specifically, it means that the analysis of the biblical text is done from the perspective of African world-view and culture.

In this case, culture informs one's interpretation of the biblical text (Kanyoro, 2009). Social experience is also another factor that affect how readers interpret biblical texts in this regard (Dube, 2009).

This is significant to this research because in the analysis of the text of Mark 5:25-34, my world-view and life experience as an African will influence my understanding of this text. This situatedness allows me to use African feminist biblical hermeneutics which prioritizes the African context and experience limits other cultures outside of the African context from influencing my reading and interpretation of Mark 5:25-34. Musa Dube (2009) in an article titled, 'Fifty Years of Bleeding: A Storytelling Reading of Mark 5:25-43' draws from gender-feminist and contextual biblical reading lens when reading in order to locate a woman in the centre of the African story as "one who defies death by continuing to sing from the many graves." This resonates with the Malawian context. Research has shown that a lot of women are dying in Malawi through unsafe abortions due to the restriction of termination of pregnancy enforced by the law (HEARD, 2016). African feminist biblical hermeneutics allow me to use Mark 5:25-34 to portray the reality of social bondage caused by restrictive laws and religious beliefs – it enables me to compare the woman in the text to the women in Malawi who are struggling for a voice and choices on matters concerning termination of pregnancy in Malawi.

African feminist biblical hermeneutics identifies the Bible as a tool for liberation, "but it is also a source of oppression and dominion," not only in the manner it was used by missionaries in colonial times, the Bible partly is intrinsically oppressive (West, 2016). Adamo points out that the framework creates a biblical hermeneutic that promotes liberation and transformation (Adamo, 2015). Masenya (2009) points out that the Church has been influenced by patriarchy

and therefore fails to be consistent with the concepts of justice and equality which it preaches. “The wrong use of Scripture (mostly always in favour of men against women) by men and by elderly women serve to oppress the Christian woman” (Masenya, 2009). This type of scriptural reading is reflected in the Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy document of the Evangelical Association of Malawi (2017) regarding termination of pregnancy. The organization uses scripture to oppose the reformation of the abortion law in Malawi as it discourages “any legislative attempt that presumes to encourage the “right” to abortion” (Evangelical Association of Malawi, 2017).

### **1.5. Research Questions**

The key question that this paper attempts to answer is related to how a re-reading of Mark 5:25-34 can empower women to have their own voices and choices on matters termination of pregnancy in Malawi. This paper suggests ways where women can be empowered and liberated through this text. This paper also attempts to answer the following additional sub-questions:

1. What is the ideo-theological use of the Bible in the debate around termination of pregnancy in Malawi?
2. What could an African feminist re-reading of Mark 5:25-34 look like?
3. What ideo-theological resources can a re-reading of Mark 5:25-34 offer to advocacy for safe abortion in Malawi?

### **1.6. Research Objectives**

This paper seeks to investigate the ideo-theological use of the Bible in the debate around termination of pregnancy in Malawi as one of the objectives. In this regard, it shows how biblical texts have been used in response to the termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi.

In addition to this, the paper seeks to show what an African feminist re-reading of Mark 5:25-34 could look like. This will involve discussions around how this text has been read by different people. My reading of this text also forms part of this.

This paper also attempts to find out what ideo-theological resources a re-reading of Mark 5:25-34 can offer to advocacy for safe abortion in Malawi. This concerns a suggestion of spaces or ways in which this text can be used in order to empower and liberate women struggling for a voice in the termination of pregnancy discourse in Malawi. It also involves how these ways can be used as tools for bringing awareness and educating the public about the reality of termination of pregnancy in Malawi.

## **1.7. Outline of Chapters**

This paper has seven chapters. The first chapter has provided the background of this research paper and introduced the Tripolar method of biblical hermeneutics as a frame through which this research is designed. African feminist biblical hermeneutics has been highlighted as the theoretical framework of this paper. The research questions and objectives of this paper have also been discussed.

The second chapter focuses on the context of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill debate in Malawi. This will involve setting out the provisions of the current abortion law in Malawi and the proposed bill. It provides some of the responses from political, medical and religious spheres. These responses – which take a rights-based approach – will be critiqued from a public healthcare and reproductive justice perspective in this chapter.

The third chapter discusses the theoretical framework of this paper. In this case, African feminist biblical hermeneutics will be used in order to critique some of the religious responses towards termination of pregnancy provided in the second chapter. To be more specific, this chapter is a critique of the way biblical texts have been used to restrict women from having access to safe abortion services in Malawi.

Chapter four focuses on the biblical text of Mark 5:25-34. This will involve a discussion of feminist readings of this text. A socio-historical and literary analysis of this text will be done in this chapter. This will involve a detailed focus on some of the narrative elements that make up this text. This will be accompanied by my reflection on this text.

Ideo-theological resources for engaging with the termination of pregnancy context in Malawi will be discussed in chapter five. This will involve discussing African feminist biblical



hermeneutic and narrative method as ideo-theological resources. Contextual Bible Study (CBS) and a rap song will additionally be suggested as ideo-theological tools for empowerment, liberation and education.

Chapter six is about notes and ideas for the CBS and rap song suggested in chapter five. This will involve a discussion about the construction of a CBS and creation of a rap song in the context of termination of pregnancy in Malawi. The questions for the CBS reading process and the message the song would carry have been outlined in this regard.

Further suggestions on how to interact with women struggling for a voice in the termination of pregnancy discourse will be discussed in the seventh chapter. This is the concluding chapter. Ideas for further research on the topic of this paper will be shared. This will be followed by a summary of the previous chapters in this paper will be done here.

## **1.8. Conclusion**

The tripolar method of biblical hermeneutics serves as a frame of this paper. This chapter has introduced the Tripolar method through the proposed termination of pregnancy bill context in Malawi, the biblical text of Mark 5:25-34 and ideo-theological forms of dialogue for engaging with this context and text. African feminist biblical hermeneutics has been highlighted as the theoretica framework for this paper. This has been followed by an outline of the research questions and objectives of this paper. A summary of what will be discussed in the following chapters has been outlined in the end. In keeping with the Tripolar method, the following chapter focuses on the context of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill debate in Malawi.

## **Chapter 2**

# **The Context of the Termination of Pregnancy Bill Debate in Malawi**

### **2.1. Introduction**

In the first chapter, I highlighted the protest that was staged in Malawi by religious leaders in response to the proposed termination of pregnancy bill. This chapter, focuses on the different voices that have emerged in response to this bill.

In this regard, I will highlight the status of the current abortion law in Malawi and set out the provisions of the new bill. I will then move on to discuss some of the responses that this bill has received. I will then identify ordinary women's voices in the debate and discuss the issue of blood and reproduction in the Bible and African culture. This will be followed by a critique of the law-based approach that the bill and some of the responses adhere to by suggesting alternative methods of tackling the issue of termination of pregnancy in Malawi.

### **2.2. Current Status of the Abortion Law and Proposed Termination of Pregnancy Bill**

Currently, termination of pregnancy is illegal in Malawi. According to the Malawi Penal Code this comes under sections 149, 150, 151 and 243 which prohibit termination of pregnancy except in cases where the pregnancy is a threat to the Mother's life (Malawi Penal Code: Chapter 7:01). Any person involved in the termination of pregnancy can receive a sentence of up to fourteen years, and seven years for the woman having an abortion (Malawi Penal Code: Chapter 7:01). The proposed termination of pregnancy bill was drafted in order to make improvements of this law; "that is, undergo conditional relaxation of the restrictions – but not decriminalised, to cater for certain justifiable grounds or instances where termination of a pregnancy should be permissible (Bickton and Kavinya, 2017).

If the termination of pregnancy bill (20...) is to be passed, the grounds through which termination of pregnancy will be allowed are in circumstances where:

- a. the continued pregnancy will endanger the life of a pregnant woman;
- b. the termination of pregnancy is necessary to prevent injury to the physical or mental health of a pregnant woman;
- c. there is severe malformation of the fetus which will affect its viability or compatibility with life; or
- d. the pregnancy is a result of rape, incest or defilement.

The following section is a brief discussion around some of the responses sparked by this proposed termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi. These responses range from political, medical and religious spheres.

### **2.3. Responses to the Proposed Termination of Pregnancy Bill**

There are different groups of people that have been involved in this debate. In this case, I summarize some of the political, medical and religious arguments concerning this debate. The fact that a lot of these groups are taking part in the debate shows how complex the issue of termination of pregnancy is in Malawi. Religious faith has been prevalent in people's opinions towards the bill as observed in this discussion.

#### **2.3.1. The Law Commission of Malawi**

From a political perspective, the Law Commission of Malawi has argued that the proposed termination of pregnancy bill is not inhumane (Chimjeka, 2016). This was said at a sensitization workshop by Mike Chinoko, the commission's deputy chief law reform officer, regarding the contents of the proposed Bill (Chimjeka, 2016). Chinoko added that Church and State matters and regulations must be distinguished from each other, he said, "Amendments to the already existing law will not be as amending Church rules. The Church must understand that there will always be a difference between Church and the State." (Chimjeka, 2016). This was said in response to the protest staged by some religious leaders against the proposed termination of pregnancy bill.

### **2.3.2. Medical Perspectives**

Offering a medical perspective on the proposed termination of pregnancy bill issue, Chisale Mhango discusses how Christian medical doctors have struggled with the issue of abortion in Malawi because of their religious faith (Mhango, 2017). Mhango argues that:

The issue is not about the rights and wrongs of abortion. It is about women dying from unsafe abortion in increasing numbers, and using increasingly more resources before they die. This is despite Malawi, enacting a law in 1930 designed specifically to eliminate abortion deaths... Doctors use the best of what they have to treat illness. The best may be toxic and hazardous, but doctors use it while they search for better options. The moment they discover or invent a better option, they abandon the less acceptable option. Termination of pregnancy to eliminate abortion deaths will follow the same path (Mhango, 2017).

Another medical perspective on the proposed bill comes from the Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship (CMDF) in Malawi. Their position on the issue is ambiguous. They oppose the proposed bill completely, but only back those supporting the bill on “the premise that it will protect women and reduce maternal mortality” (Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship, 2017). They point out that they join them to show their concern on the high rate of maternal deaths in Malawi and to maintain their commitment and role in making sure that women do not die from complications that are related to pregnancy (Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship, 2017). They argue that the bill does not decrease maternal mortality but in fact makes it worse (Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship, 2017). One of the bases for their argument is that, “the proposed legislation provides inadequate protection against abortion on demand, in the wording of clause 3-1-b, which cites the prevention of “injury to the physical or mental health of a pregnant woman” as grounds for termination of a pregnancy” (Christian Medical and Dental Fellowship, 2017).

### **2.3.3. Religious Opinions**

The Roman Catholic Church has challenged the government on the bill and claim that the people of Malawi do not support termination of pregnancy at all (Crux, 2017).

Speaking at the World Congress of Families in Lilongwe, Archbishop Thomas Luke Msusa of the Roman Catholic Church called for the Malawi Government to allow a referendum on the matter (Crux, 2017). He also insisted that:

We believe that life begins at conception; sacredness and sanctity of human life; both the mother and unborn child have the right to life and that all instances of direct abortions are a violation of the rights of the unborn because it is a wilful killing of innocent life (Crux, 2017).

In 2016, the archbishop also took the same stance at a Church event in Karonga, Malawi:

Human life is sacred, because from its beginning to the end, no one can, under any circumstances, claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being. Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception (Mwale, 2016).

Providing a different religious perspective, Malawi Council of Churches General Secretary Bishop Doctor Gilford Immanuel Matonga is confident that the faith community will support the proposed bill (Nkawihe, 2016). Matonga said, “It is necessary for the Church to consider adding new grounds on which safe abortions can be allowed. We would want to sensitize the faith community on grounds to provide for safe abortions” (Nkawihe, 2016). He added that, “the proposed bill gives guidance on how safe abortions can be done. After being properly informed, the Church will be able to approve” (Nkawihe, 2016). Matonga was quick to reiterate the MCC’s position on free-for-all abortions saying:

The Church opposes abortion on demand; meaning if a woman is pregnant [she] should not just seek abortion at free will. The proposed law gives three grounds on why abortion can be done. One is when she is raped, when her life is threatened by the pregnancy and on incest thus when a child is impregnated by a family member. But also when there is a malformation of the fetus – no proper development of the child in the womb (Nkawihe, 2016).

The Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM) published a Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy document in 2017 in the wake of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill. Scripture is identified as one of the foundations of this document (Evangelical Association of Malawi, 2017). I will mainly use direct quotes in order to avoid fabricating the arguments made in this policy document based on the Bible.

In this document, reproductive health is defined as:

A state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes (Evangelical Association of Malawi, 2017).

The overall goal of this policy document is:

To provide a guidance to evangelical Churches and faith-based organizations in Malawi for active, and full participation in the teachings, designs and implementation of issues and programmes of sex, sexuality and reproduction that would accelerate the improvement of sexual and reproductive health outcomes based on doctrinal principles (Evangelical Association of Malawi, 2017).

The objectives of the document according to the Evangelical Association of Malawi (2017) are to:

1. Enhance accurate knowledge and skills among religious and Church lay leaders at various levels on issues of sex, sexuality and reproductive health.
2. Facilitate relevant, effective and efficient decision making among religious decision makers and programme managers in addressing issues of sexual and reproductive health in areas of teaching, programming and service delivery.
3. Provide guidance in responding to issues of sexual and reproductive health that would demonstrate the relevance of practicing what the Church believes regarding the promotion of a health living for this life.

The above mentioned goal and objectives are based on biblical scripture and the EAM uses the following Bible verses in order to make the following arguments:

The life of a human being begins immediately after fertilization and in the entire process of human development God is fully involved and in control at each and every stage (Psalm 139:13-16, Jeremiah 1:5)... the Scriptures bear witness to the involvement of God in the origin of each human being in the womb. God creates our inner most being, knits us together, weaves us in respect (Psalm 139:13-16), fashions like clay, pour us out like hot milk and curdles us like cheese, clothes us with skin and flesh (Job 10:8-11), gives us life and breathe, sets in order the elements within us, sends breath into the bones in the womb (Ecclesiastes 11:5), inspires us with an active soul... The embryo

must be defended in its integrity, tended and cared for, and enjoying the right to life like any other human being. The Church has God given obligation to speak on behalf of the voiceless including the unborn baby (Proverbs 31:8-9). For failure to do so the blood and the life lost by the unborn babies in the silence of the Church results into the Church being punished of disobedience to God. (Evangelical Association of Malawi, 2017).

The EAM's position in regard to termination of pregnancy is that:

The Church stands strongly against and condemns any abortion procedure and/ or any other medical and surgical procedures with the direct and primary intent of removing an embryo or non-viable fetus from the uterus... All acts of terminating life including induced abortion shall always be considered as an act of terminating life by the Church... Pro-actively engage the Government of Malawi and other stakeholders including community and political leaders not to legalize abortion in Malawi (Evangelical Association of Malawi, 2017).

#### **2.3.4. Ordinary Women's Voices**

In the light of the different opinions from political, medical and religious spheres discussed in the previous section, this section identifies the lack of voices from ordinary women in the context of the termination of pregnancy debate in Malawi. According to Winnie Botha (2016), "The heated debate about liberalisation of abortion has been dogged by lies, assumptions and even religious

dogma." She points out that:

There is a misconception among anti-choice campaigners that women who terminate their pregnancies do so because they are happy to do so. They never consider the emotional, psychological and medical conditions of women who terminate pregnancies (Botha, 2016).

Brian Ligomeka, Executive Director of Centre for Solutions Journalism has identified state and religious traditions as a contributing factor to ordinary women's silence in the debate. Ligomeka argues that:

It is unacceptable for the state and religious denominations to be denying women access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights in the name of archaic laws, religion or culture (International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion, 2018).

Botha (2016) notes that, as a woman, she feels saddened by the fact that it is men who are at the forefront of opposing the reformation of laws concerning the health and rights of women. She adds that, it is also men who make laws that affect women directly (Botha, 2016). This contributes to the silencing of women and she argues that:

The decision to continue or end unwanted pregnancy should be left in the hands of the one carrying it. Men should not make laws for women on issues they do not experience and understand (Botha, 2016).

Ligomeka argues that, in order to break this silence, women should be granted “access to sexual and reproductive health services without interference from the state and the Church” (International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion, 2018). The responses in the previous section, especially those from a religious leaders and the EAM do not support women’s rights to termination of pregnancy. I am being tempted to make a conclusion that such responses are the reason why women seek backstreet abortions. This argument is not conclusive; it is debatable. It could also be argued that such responses contribute to women being silent in the termination of pregnancy discourse in Malawi. The following section discusses issues of blood and reproduction in the Bible and African culture in order to show how they affect women.

#### **2.4. A Case against Law-based Approach to Women’s Reproductive Health**

This discussion is based on Lisa Isherwood’s and Elizabeth Stuart’s introduction to body theology. They point to the body as an important aspect of human life. Focusing on the body enables us to find other ways of engaging with the termination of pregnancy bill context that allow women’s voices to be heard. I make an argument here for law-based approaches to matters related to women’s bodies – termination of pregnancy in this case – to be abandoned because they restrict women from exercising their bodily autonomy.



According to Isherwood and Stuart, “the body is deeply symbolic in human culture, the means by which and through which the person and the community express themselves” (1998:10). This means that the body is a channel through which people communicate their experiences. Human experience is crucial in this regard. For example, women’s experience is significant in the establishment of theology and this experience is situated in body and mind (Isherwood and Stuart 1998:10).

Adding on to the importance of the body, Isherwood and Stuart say:

In an age when we can transplant blood and organs from one person to another in order to bring life; when people's bodies can be augmented by artificial means; when a person's sex can be altered; when beings can be cloned; when heterosexual and patriarchal understandings of the body are breaking down, issues of bodily identity worry us and yet in an age when aesthetics appears to have largely replaced metaphysics, the body seems to be all we have. The body matters and so it is little wonder that a distinctive genre of theology known as body theology has developed (1998:10).

It is not easy to evaluate the level of Christian influence on the establishment of patriarchy and attitudes towards the body (Isherwood and Stuart 1998:10). Isherwood and Stuart argue that patriarchy and Christianity go hand in hand and:

This means that as feminist liberation theologians we have to address the reality of the imprisonment of the body under these systems and look for a way to break free from the crushing embrace of patriarchy (1998:19).

Where government and religious doctrines are influenced by patriarchy through rights-based approaches, alternative ways need to be established in order to free women’s bodies from bondage. Laws that are restrictive – the abortion law and the termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi – bind women from exercising body autonomy. Feminist arguments about abortion rights have been involved in big debates on how to produce rights claims that are just and equal (Smyth, 2002). This prompts the question, “how should we think of gender differences in ways that are theoretically sophisticated, empirically true, and do not lead to women’s disadvantage?” (Kenney, 2008).

#### **2.4.1. Flaws of the Law-based Approach towards Termination of Pregnancy**

This section is a discussion about alternative ways that can be used in Malawian the place of law-based approaches when dealing with issues concerning termination of pregnancy. It is a critique of the law-based approach to termination of pregnancy as presented by the current abortion law and the proposed termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi. I will begin with highlighting the problems associated with the law-based approach and then go on to identify public health care and reproductive justice as alternative ways of engaging with the issue of termination of pregnancy in Malawi.

Vincent Boama and Sabaratnam Arulkumaran (2009) point out that there are different ways through which maternal mortality and morbidity can be reduced. They highlight “some of the current global efforts on safer pregnancy with a focus on reproductive rights” (Boama and Arulkumaran, 2009). The law-based approach assumes unrestricted action to women looking for abortions (Beynon-Jones, Toerien and Mcleod, 2017). It is also “based on the assumption of competing recognition claims” (Smyth, 2002). This position evokes arguments on rights on the part of a fetus (Smyth, 2002). This is an argument for another conversation; I am focused on alternative ways of dealing with the issue of termination of pregnancy other than law-based approaches. Failure to allocate and develop guidelines that are not focused on women (or which are based on laws) “further reduce women’s access to rights and set unacceptable limitations on women’s reproductive autonomy” (Taylor, 2015).

Louise du Toit (2014) questions the usefulness of the law-based approach as far as supporting women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights freedom is concerned in Africa. She investigates whether the law-based approach should be used as a supporting tool for the struggles of African women for sexual freedom and autonomy:

Human rights discourse thus has an undeniably moral dimension that aims to limit and shape political and legal power by stating in descriptive language what ‘ought to be’ the case. In contexts where human rights claims are most persistently made, they are likely to be least acknowledged (du Toit, 2014).

The following two sections identify the failure to ensure safe abortion access to women and failure to consider factors that determine women's decisions on termination of pregnancy as some of the flaws of law-based approach.

#### **2.4.1.1. Failure to Ensure Safe Abortion Access**

One of the problems associated with the law-based approach to termination of pregnancy is that it does not push the government to ensure safe access to abortion services for women (Smyth, 2002). This gives the government the upper hand as far as arguing for implementation of laws is concerned. Jenny Myers and Mourad Seif (2010) point out that:

There are significant variations in the legislation, restrictions and legal abortion rates worldwide. This undoubtedly influences the provision and accessibility to abortion services. Even though changes have been made to laws in some countries there is still a long way for access to safe abortion to be achieved.

Isaac Adewole and Nnenna Orji (2008) point out that, “the more politically liberal a country is in terms of citizenship rights and equitable distribution of resources, the more likely women are to have access to safe abortion services.” This might not be the case in most of the countries in Africa. According to Adewole and Orji (2008):

A strong link exists not only between unsafe abortion and individual lack of access to resources, but also as part of a wider lack of functional democracy and good governance, with significant implications for those working to expand women's access to safe services... While some Nigerian advocates argue that the law should simply be ignored, others have chosen to focus on reforming it.

Even though the termination of pregnancy bill is a step towards the reformation of the abortion law in Malawi, it remains restrictive. The government in Malawi has to find other ways to ensure safe access to abortion services to women in the country. Failure to ensure access to safe services should call for the abandonment of the law-based approach in Malawi. Alternative approaches that best serve the interests of women and their rights need to be implemented.

#### **2.4.1.2. Failure to Consider Factors that Influence Abortion Decisions**

There are many factors that influence people's decision making around abortion. According to Jason Hans and Claire Kimberly, some of these factors include: circumstances that led to pregnancy, relationship status, male partner's wishes and potential role as a father, financial circumstances, health of the woman, health of the fetus, family planning or timing issues, demands on women for balancing work and family, woman's development age and gestational age (Hans and Kimberly, 2014).

One of the problems of the law-based approach in this case is that it fails to consider these factors. The problem with feminist right claims in this case arise when decisions are seen as "a woman's right to choose" (Smyth, 2002). "The major problem which has facilitated this appropriation lies in the meaning of the term "choice," generally defined both culturally and legally, as an aggregation of ideas of privacy and autonomy" (Smyth, 2002).

Emphasizing on privacy hinders the consideration of the social factors which produce involuntary pregnancies and abortion access calls (Smyth, 2002). Drawing from Smyth as well, Beynon-Jones, Toerien and Mcleod (2017) point out that this claim, "fails to consider the gendered, raced and classed social conditions that, firstly, lead to unwanted or unstoppable pregnancies." This also regulates the ability for women to have the right to 'choose' (Beynon-Jones, Toerien and Mcleod, 2017). Women should have full autonomy – it is their own bodies after all – given they are the ones who go through the different circumstances that influence their decision making around termination of pregnancy.

#### **2.4.2. Reproductive Justice and Public Healthcare**

Having highlighted the flaws associated with the law-based approach towards termination of pregnancy, I will at this point discuss public health care and reproductive justice as alternative ways of engaging with the termination of pregnancy issue in Malawi.

The public healthcare approach is a result of feminist dissatisfaction with the law-based approach (Smyth, 2002). It is an alternative political framework which focuses on a mother and child relationship (Smyth, 2002). The experiences of women are a major concern in this

approach (Smyth, 2002) In this regard, access to safe abortion is taken as a way of improving the health of women through the reduction of disease and death rates related with unsafe abortion (Beynon-Jones, Toerien and Mcleod, 2017).

This deals with the issue of failure to ensure access to safe abortion that the law based approach fails to answer. I see the public healthcare approaches more of a principle rather than a law. It is not a regulation as it gives women the responsibility and freedom of what to do with their pregnancy considering the circumstances of the pregnancy itself.

The reproductive justice approach pays attention to the circumstances around a woman's pregnancy. Reproductive justice, "considers the intersecting conditions that serve to enhance or hinder women's reproductive freedoms including their capacities to decide about the outcome of their pregnancies" (Beynon-Jones, Toerien and Mcleod, 2017). Focusing on these conditions alone is not sufficient enough. Beynon-Jones, Toerien and Mcleod suggest a reparative justice framework which is seen as an improvement on the reproductive justice approach. Reparative justice in this case is associated with making amends for an injustice when the interests of an individual or community are harmed (Beynon-Jones, Toerien and Mcleod, 2017).

Beynon-Jones, Toerien and Mcleod point out that, "a key advantage of this framework as a basis for theorizing justice in relation to unwanted and unstoppable pregnancies is that it foregrounds the needs of individual women, and the concrete ways in which these might be addressed" (Beynon-Jones, Toerien and Mcleod, 2017). There is more focus on women when it comes to termination of pregnancy here; something that I think the law-based approach does not do enough. This would give women the power in terms of decision making based on the circumstances of their pregnancies. This ensures that factors that affect a woman's decision around abortion are put into consideration.

There are helpful lessons that can be learnt from countries that have successfully done away with restrictive abortion laws, or enhanced the conditions through which abortions can be performed legally (Myers and Seif, 2010). Myers and Seif note that, "achieving these gains requires prolonged and co-ordinated efforts from lawyers, health researchers and activists" (Myers and Seif, 2010). Adopting the public healthcare and reproductive justice approach as discussed here would be necessary alternative ways where the law-based approach fails.

## **2.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the context of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi. In this case, the current status of the abortion law and the provisions of the proposed bill have been highlighted. This has been followed by different views from political, medical and religious spheres in response to the bill. The lack of ordinary women's voices has been identified in the context of the debate around termination of pregnancy. It has been argued that the law-based approach used through the current abortion law and the proposed termination of pregnancy bill is lacking. It is restrictive and therefore not suitable. Public health and reproductive justice approaches have been identified as alternative approaches towards dealing with the issue of termination of pregnancy in Malawi.

## **Chapter 3**

### **African Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter discusses African feminist biblical hermeneutics. This is the theoretical framework used in this paper as pointed out in the first chapter. In this regard, I am using African feminist biblical hermeneutics as a way of reading the biblical text of Mark 5:25-35 - which this research engages with- in the next chapter. Here, I will introduce this framework and use it to critique some ways in which biblical texts are used; the way scripture is used in the EAM SRH Policy Document (2017) concerning termination of pregnancy is an example of this. The sources and aims of African feminist biblical hermeneutics in relation to women in the African context will be part of the discussion.

#### **3.2. Sources of African Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics**

This section looks at three sources of African Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics. These are: the Bible, history and women's experiences. However, it is important to note that these are not the distinct sources of this framework. This includes useful analysis and insights on feminist biblical hermeneutics from feminists who are not African biblical scholars.

##### **3.2.1. The Bible**

The context of the reader is focused on using different methods of exegesis which are applied to the realities of the African context (Nyirawung, 2013). This approach draws from the contexts where biblical texts were written and then puts emphasis on the relevance of the message in the text to the African context (Nyirawung, 2013). "It is about how issues raised in

the Bible can be interpreted and addressed within the social, cultural and religious context of Africa” (Nyirawung, 2013).

To add on to this, Masenya and Ramantswana (2015) point to the importance of situating the Bible in its context:

The ‘situatedness’ of the Bible in an ancient context has to form part of preliminary understanding. The agenda of ABH is not simply with the incarnation of the Word *then*, but also with the incarnation of the Word *now*. If the Bible is to be meaningful in our African contexts, it has to incarnate into an African form – it has to become an African Word. The Pentecost phenomenon has to become a living reality in our contexts. God understands and speaks our languages.

Proper examination of scripture helps in realizing the absence of women in the Bible (Deifelt, 1997:49). Through hermeneutics, one becomes aware of the non-normative status that women are given and critical of the stereotypical portrayal of women in the Bible (Deifelt, 1997:49). This calls for transformation in terms of how biblical texts are interpreted and used. According to Deifelt:

Feminist hermeneutics points out the need for deconstructing patriarchy in its social, cultural, political and ideological aspects through the literary expressions the patriarchy engenders... challenges the notion of canonization as a finished process. It shifts the authority of the text unto the readers, who decide whether or not to ascribe authority to the scriptures... In relation to the Bible it proposes revision, continuous reading, and interpretation to bring to the biblical canon the experiences of women (1997:51).

A re-reading of Mark 5:25-34 in this sense, helps to challenge the views expressed by some religious leaders in Malawi in response to the proposed termination of pregnancy bill and the stance of the EAM on abortion since their responses are based on scripture. My understanding of the EAM’s position on termination of pregnancy is that they do not support it at all and are not open to any reforms on the abortion law in Malawi. This shows their ignorance. They use scripture to support their views and have no room to consider the different circumstances that influence women’s decisions to terminate pregnancy. They claim that, “the Church has God given obligation to speak on behalf of the voiceless” (Evangelical Association of Malawi, 2017), yet they fail to speak for – and silence – women who are struggling to have a voice in the termination of pregnancy context in Malawi.



### 3.2.2. Women's Experiences

The other source that African feminist theologies draw on in the Church and society is women's experiences (Kanyoro, 1997:176). This involves recognising women's experiences and their writings in scholarship "as belonging to the normative traditional mode by which literature is evaluated (up to this point, evaluated entirely on male experience)" (Deifelt 1997:49).

Ideologies that are cultural and concern gender roles and power are rooted in women's lived experiences (Kanyoro 2001:107). In some cases, "a "women's reading" of the Bible does not answer the questions that bother us" (Kanyoro 2001:108). This according to Kanyoro poses a challenge on African women doing theology in terms of how to bring hope to the African context (2001:108). In this case, there is need for more work to be done on the history of the African culture and the systems that maintain it (Kanyoro 2001:110). Kanyoro adds that:

The task of African women is not only to correct past records but also to provide fresh data on the variety of women's experiences and on the nature of their struggles against oppression. The objective is not merely to write women back into history, but also to record gender struggles as defined by history, culture, race, and class structures in Africa (2001:111).

The task is not only to understand the texts in the Bible, but also to transform the powers of oppression that are found through-out history and their effects on all people (Mwaura 2003:77). A *Bosadi* approach to reading biblical texts proposed by Masenya could help in terms of prioritising women's experiences. One of the elements of this approach is that it critiques the aspects of the Bible which are oppressive to women while putting liberative aspects in the spotlight (Masenya 2001:148).

Putting into consideration women's experiences could help religious leaders and the government to realize the struggles that different women have when negotiating biblical texts and laws that hinder their freedom of choice and restrict their access to safe abortion services. The EAM SRH Policy Document (2017) plays a part in such restrictions by refusing women any access by urging "the Government of Malawi and other stakeholders including community and political leaders not to legalize abortion in Malawi." This document does not consider women's experiences at all. Women need to be supported in their quest for access to

abortion services. Religious groups should not serve as hindrances, but promoters (Joy 2004:80).

### **3.3.3. Through History**

According to Musa Dube (2012), “biblical interpretation in the sub-Saharan Africa cannot be separated from politics, economics and cultural identity, of the past and present.” African Feminist theologies attempt to look at the histories of women through the Bible, Church teachings and the practices of the Church from the past to present (Kanyoro 1997:177). Biblical interpretation is shaped by the African historical context (Dube, 2012). “Sadly, women have found that our histories are deeply rooted in patriarchy which is part of our cultural heritage” (Kanyoro 1997:177). Feminist hermeneutics points out the exclusion of women from history (Deifelt 1997:50). According to Deifelt (1997:50), “Women have been silenced, marginalized and perceived as inessential to the making of civilization.” Vasanthakumar (1997:44) makes an interesting argument related to this:

The fact that the books of the Bible are a product of their own historical context – in which subjugation of women was a reality – further worsens the situation. Women’s struggle has not been faithfully recorded. However, in a few places where references are found a liberating process is depicted and the message is conveyed effectively if the passages are read in their own historical context.

Masenya and Ramantswana emphasize the need to embrace the otherness of the Bible in this regard. They point out that:

It is only when we recognise the Bible’s Otherness that we can do justice to appropriating it for ourselves. The Bible came into being in space and time within the life of Israel, within Judaism, and the world of early Christianity. The erasure of this fact is to disembodify the Bible of its form and vitality as a document of God’s dealings with Israel in space and time. In its final form, the Bible is a product of a long history of development (Masenya and Ramantswana, 2015).

This calls for the discovery of the presence of women in the Bible: that women have their own stories that are different from those of men, but have been dismissed by patriarchy (Deifelt 1997:49). The African culture plays a massive role here. Kanyoro (1997:177) points out that:

In both the private and public spheres, the roles and images of African women are socially and culturally defined. Within this framework of operation, women have been socialized into a state of numbness where we have lived our lives without really determining the course of it. A better understanding of scriptures can affect the way women participate in group worship as well as private personal meditation. When we look at our cultures we know for certain that there are cases where they dehumanize women. If we relate our study of culture to the scriptures and theology, we are empowered with new courage and language to speak to new life-styles which reflect the justice of God for all people.

One of the advantages of feminist scholarship is its ability to hear women's stories and to realize that the subordination of women as a gender is an intersection of race, class, religion or nationality (Kanyoro 1997:176). To "recognize the need for race and class to be an integral part of the discourse surrounding gender" (Phiri and Nadar 2006:4). This becomes relevant in the discussions about the factors that influence African women's decisions and choices when it comes to termination of pregnancy. Scripture should not be taken literally. Different biblical texts were written in/for different times. We can use them now for valuable lessons that are life affirming to people and not in ways that marginalize them. My hope is that the EAM and other religious leaders realize this.

### **3.3. Aims of African Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics**

As mentioned in the previous section, the EAM use scripture in their SRH Policy Document (2017) to restrict women from accessing safe abortion services in Malawi. The importance of considering women's experiences and the context of scripture has been highlighted as something that is lacking in this SRH policy document. To further critique the way biblical texts are used by the EAM on termination of pregnancy in Malawi, this section focuses on two aims of African feminist biblical hermeneutics.

### 3.3.1. Liberation

“Liberation is one of the dominant themes in the Bible, particularly so in the context of women’s struggle for humanhood” (Vasanthakumar 1997:44). African feminist biblical hermeneutics identifies the Bible as a tool for liberation, “but it is also a source of oppression and dominion,” not only in the manner it was used by missionaries in colonial times; the Bible partly is intrinsically oppressive (West, 2016). Adamo points out that this framework creates a biblical hermeneutic that promotes liberation and transformation (Adamo, 2015). Masenya (2009) points out that the Church has been influenced by patriarchy and therefore fails to be consistent with the concepts of justice and equality which it preaches. “The wrong use of Scripture (mostly always in favour of men against women) by men and by elderly women serve to oppress the Christian woman” (Masenya, 2009).

This type of scriptural reading, as has been mentioned, is reflected in the Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy document of the Evangelical Association of Malawi (2017) regarding termination of pregnancy. The organization uses scripture to oppose the reformation of the abortion law in Malawi as it discourages “any legislative attempt that presumes to encourage the “right” to abortion” (Evangelical Association of Malawi, 2017).

On top of locating the bleeding woman in Mark 5:25-34 in the African context, Dube portrays the woman as one who is wholly involved in the quest to find healing and survival (Dube, 2009). This helps with reflection around the urgent need to reform the termination of pregnancy law in Malawi. Reforming the law ensures that not many women lose their lives through unsafe abortion; it enables women to gain access to proper health care services. It is important then that biblical texts should be “re-read in the context of the struggle of women to affirm their human dignity and humanhood” (Vasanthakumar 1997:44). Vasanthakumar (1997:44) argues that this is the only way through which the meaning of biblical texts can be recreated and reactivated and not just improved; “it becomes contextualized, made relevant and not allegorized” (Vasanthakumar 1997:44).

This allows a suspicious approach to the Bible and provides space to question some readings of the Bible that marginalize women – readings that say termination of pregnancy is a sin, for example. The Bible should not be used as a tool for violating women’s individual rights by justifying whether it is right to terminate pregnancy or not. Biblical texts need to be handled

carefully; they should be used as a resource for engaging with different matters in society in ways that are life affirming and just.

### **3.3.2. Challenging Patriarchy**

Gender injustice to women is seen in how patriarchy has affected African women's "experience and naming of God, and shaped our structures of work, worship and decision-making" (Kanyoro 1997:177). Feminist hermeneutics as one of the starting points plays a very critical role in the interpretation process of the Bible since scripture directly impacts on the perceptions and expectations of women in society (Deifelt 1997:49).

In this regard, careful consideration of the text and its context and its relevance to a contemporary reader's context goes a long way in terms of dealing with the misuse of scripture. For example, what a particular biblical text says about women, should not mean the same for the women of our time; it was written for women in that particular time. Ephesians 5:22-24 urges wives to submit to their husbands. This does not mean that it is how things should be in our time now; careless interpretation would lead to the idea that women should subordinate to men.

It is also important in this regard to note that biblical texts cannot be identified with the word of God (Vasanthakumar 1997:43). "The way the Bible has been used and misused to keep women bound to a certain type of submissive, subordinate behaviour is the starting point of many feminist hermeneutics" (Deifelt 1997:49). Vasanthakumar (1997:43) points out the importance of hermeneutics here by arguing that biblical interpretations that come from the understanding that "the whole Bible is inspired and inerrant cannot stand the test of hermeneutical principles." There is need for readers to go beyond this understanding in order the word of God when interpreting biblical texts (Vasanthakumar 1997:43).

There is emphasis on equality in this case. Both men and women are made in the image of God; men and women are named and claimed as God's offspring (Kanyoro, 1997:176). Kanyoro (1997:176) points out that, "despite women's diverse social, economic and political backgrounds, by virtue of belonging to the female gender women constitute an oppressed social group." In this regard, there is a commitment to women living at the margins in faith communities (Phiri and Nadar 2006:6). African feminist biblical hermeneutics helps in making

this recognition – that women struggling for a voice should be the starting point of the termination of pregnancy discourse in Malawi. The EAM fails to recognize that.

### **3.4. Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the theoretical framework for this research. Discussions in this regard have involved the sources and aims of African feminist biblical hermeneutics. This chapter has served as a critique of the use of biblical texts that hinder women from having access to safe abortion services using this framework. The EAM has been identified as an example of those who use scripture in this way. The following chapter focuses on the biblical text of Mark 5:25-34. In this case, African feminist biblical hermeneutics serves as the lens through which I will read and analyse this text.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Feminist Readings, Socio-historical and Literary Analysis of Mark 5:25-34**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the biblical text used in this research in order to engage with the context of termination of pregnancy in Malawi. Mark 5:25-34 is a story about a woman who defies the odds in the quest for liberation from sickness. She shows immense courage and is being used in this paper in order to serve as a role model for the women struggling to have voices and choices on matters concerning termination of pregnancy in Malawi.

There are three main sections in this chapter. The first section features some feminist readings of Mark 5:25-43. The second section discusses the socio-historical background of the Gospel of Mark in general in terms of the estimated time the text was written, the author and the intended audience of this gospel, the representation of women in the social context of the Gospel of Mark and the issues of blood and reproduction in the Bible and African culture. The aim of this analysis is to draw some comparisons between the context of women during the time when the text was written and the current African context.

In the third section, I will provide my literary analysis and interpretation of Mark 5:25-34. The literary analysis will involve an examination of the narrative elements that form part of this text; the structure, the narrative point of view, the plot, the setting and the characters of this text.

#### **4.2. Feminist Readings of Mark 5:25-34**

This text is being re-read in this study in order to encourage and empower women in cases where patriarchal norms limit them from having voices, making choices of their own and exercising their body rights. This is being done with the current abortion law and proposed termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi in mind. Reading in the African context, Musa Dube

(2001:5) points out that, African women choose to believe that the woman in this text has been granted freedom to exercise freedom of choice. This text according to Dube:

Offers a model of transforming power, which calls for the active involvement of the powerless and the powerful... it suggests that the powerful and the powerless must work together to redistribute power, to share it and to use it positively (2001:6).

Even though the gospel of Mark is androcentric by nature, Dewey (1995) points out that, “it is also perhaps the most liberating Gospel in the Christian Testament for any oppressed or marginalized group.” This is how I am reading the narrative of Mark 5:25-34. In this sense, I am using this text as a tool for the liberation of women in Malawi in the context of termination of pregnancy rights. Mark keenly knew that salvation happens in the real human world (Harrington 2002:8).

Women should not to be excluded from the engagement of issues that affect their bodies and lives (Botha, 2016). This is a feature of transformative biblical hermeneutics which is about reading and interpreting the Bible in ways “whereby women can be empowered to become agents of self-actualization in their worlds” (Dube 2001:12).

Happy Mhango (2004) points out the importance of reading biblical texts from the perspective of women and those who are marginalized in the quest for justice and liberation in Malawi. “Serious questions have been raised in Malawian Church and Society concerning the inferiority and subordination of women and the oppressed” (Mhango, 2004). Mhango (2004) points out to how women have been excluded and discriminated in different ways; “They have not taken an active share and responsibility in the whole community life of society, and have not participated fully and more widely in the various fields of the Church's structures.” This hints at the silence of ordinary women around the termination of pregnancy bill debate in Malawi.

Mhango (2004) points to the root of the problem:

The coming of Missionaries to Malawi set a solid Christian foundation. The bible which they brought has been used by the Church and individual members for cultural, educational, socio-political and religious transformation. However, despite this foundation, women have continued to experience a subordinate social status both domestically and in society. Their low status stems from traditional values and cultural practices, as well as religious prescriptions, low education and low economic status. Men have taken advantage of their societal and religious position to exploit and



marginalise women and the oppressed groups. The problem is located in the understanding and interpretation of the bible. The patriarchal religion found in the bible has immensely contributed to the oppression and exploitation of women in our Churches and societies. The biblical readings that have dominated in Churches are patriarchal and androcentric. These patriarchal readings put women and the oppressed on the periphery and displace them as if they are insignificant in history and social life.

According to Dube, the narrative offers models of gender empowerment (2004:21). Dube (2004) points out that Mark 5:25-34 offers (a) a model of abuse of power with regard to the physicians, (b) a model of using one's power to empower others, as illustrated by Jesus and (c) a model where the marginalized become agents of their own empowerment, "best captured by the bleeding woman's search for healing" (Dube 2004:22). Jesus, in this regard, could represent those who support women and the choices they make and the woman in the narrative, the women speaking out and taking action in the termination of pregnancy context in Malawi. Elizabeth Joy speaks of following Jesus by example in the text:

Nothing prevents a person from approaching, encountering or touching Jesus. No social, religious, or political laws can keep a person away from Jesus. No gender bias can keep a person away from Jesus. No enslaving tradition can stand victoriously when one is in contact or touch with Jesus. All these crumble down. Jesus accepts people from everywhere or anywhere and clothes them with dignity and honour. Jesus reinstates the identity of a person as a human being created in the image of God (2004:80).

Creating space where women are free to speak and get involved in discussions around different matters serves as a very important first step towards liberation as far as exercising body rights is concerned. This could encourage women to take the case in their own hands, but it is sometimes the duty of someone else to raise the case especially in situations of poor health (Szabolcs 2004:119). This suggests that everyone is responsible for women's involvement in dialogues on different matters.

### **4.3. Socio-historical Analysis of Mark 5:25-34**

This section offers a socio-historical analysis of Mark 5:25-34. This is being discussed in order to give perspective on the social context the text originated from and the status of women during that time.

#### **4.3.1. The Estimated Time the Gospel of Mark was Written**

According to Dewey (1995), “the Gospel of Mark is anonymous”. “We have no certain knowledge about the text, the author, the time or place of writing, or the intended audience, except what we can infer from the text itself” (Dewey 1995:471). It appears that the Gospel of Mark was written about forty years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, around 70 C.E. at the end of the Roman-Jewish war (Dewey 1995:472).

According to Witherington (2001:31), there are two positions to consider around the discussion about the social context of the Gospel of Mark: “the social setting that Mark is reporting on in his Gospel – Galilee and Judea in 20s and 30s – and Rome in the 60s.” As Dewey has pointed out on the period of writing of this Gospel, Witherington (2001) notes that these two social settings come across around 60 and 70 during the Jewish war. At this time, things were very difficult for both Jews and Christians because of the war (Witherington 2001:31).

The idea that Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome and for people in Rome around the 60s has been prevalent for long (Harrington 2002:11). However, this view has been challenged because of the uncertainty around the traditional data which points to the origin and date of this Gospel (Harrington 2002:11).

Harrington (2002:12) argues that a detailed reading of Mark 13 points to a date right after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. and proposes that the Gospel of Mark “was written to and for a Christian community somewhere in the Roman province of Syria.” This provides a setting closer to the catastrophic events of the war; “the community may even have harboured Christian refugees from the conflict, making it that much more immediate” (Harrington 2002:12).

#### **4.3.2. The Author of the Gospel of Mark**

The author of the Gospel of Mark is not mentioned in the text (Harrington 2002:11). “It is formally anonymous, as, unlike Paul’s letters, the author nowhere mentions his name between v.1 and the end of the document” (Witherington 2001:20). It is not known if the superscript was applied by the author himself (Witherington 2001:20).

Robin Branch points out that traditionally, it is accepted that the Gospel of Mark was written by John Mark and drew his information from his association with Peter (Branch, 2013). Such views are just suppositions and are not reliable (Dewey 1995:471). Now, scholarship takes a different view (Branch, 2013). Traditionally, the name Mark was very common (Harrington 2002: 11). A few things are known about Mark. According to Witherington, Mark might have been a Christian, a Jew and educated (2001:20). This is so as he appears to be persuaded by the Gospel of Christ and in turn persuades others, shows knowledge of the Jewish culture and its customs and can read and write respectively (Witherington 2001:20).

#### **4.3.3. The Intended Audience of the Gospel of Mark**

Harrington suggests that we can be confident that Mark wrote for a particular community and in the midst of the actual circumstances of that community (2002:11). Witherington notes that the Gospel of Mark “is remarkable because it is written mostly about ordinary people who were not by and large part of the social elite” (Witherington 2002:32). He however does not think that Mark’s audience was only of the lowest social level; it makes more sense that there were some of the higher social level (Witherington 2002:32).

According to Dewey:

The intended audience probably included both Jews and Gentiles: in some instances common Jewish customs are explained; in others, knowledge about the Jewish tradition seems to be assumed. The narrative is in simple Greek, with an oral storytelling style, which suggests that the Gospel was neither written by nor intended for the small literate elite of the Roman Empire (1995:472).

#### 4.3.4. Representation of Women in Ancient Israel

The image of Eve represents the image of woman in the Old Testament, “augmented perhaps by a handful of Bible storybook “heroines,” and villainesses, as the case may be (Sarah, Deborah, Ruth, Esther, Jezebel, Delilah)” (Bird 1997:13). Bird notes that, some may think in this regard of the number of women who are silent and unacknowledged but carry on the non-ending genealogies of males (Bird 1997:13). Bird (1997:13) argues that the Old Testament is a “book” that belongs to men where women mostly appear as supplements of men and important only in the light of men’s activities.

Regardless of the fact that the Old Testament laws partly provide ancient Israel norms, “they are nevertheless a primary source for reconstructing the ideals and practices of that society” (Bird 1997:20). Discrimination against women was a very common systemic function of the socio-religious establishment of ancient Israel (Bird 1997:23). Women were often excluded from the religious space (Bird 1997:27). According to Bird (1997:27):

Israelite religion, following widespread ancient practice, excluded from cultic participation all persons in a state of impurity of uncleanness – that is, in a profane or unholy state. Various circumstances were understood to signal such a state, during which time (usually limited) it was considered unsafe to engage in cultic activity or have contact with the cult.

Due to this, the status of woman in ancient Israel can firstly be summarized as a legal nonperson and secondly, as inferior; her visibility is marked with dependence and placed in a male centred and dominated society respectively (Bird, 1997:30). The laws do not address nor do they acknowledge the existence of the woman in this regard (Bird, 1997:30).

The narrative of Mark 5:25-34 represents men and women differently, Dube (2004: 20) looks at how they are gendered. Dube points out that, “an assessment from a gender perspective highlights gendered identities and apparent unequal power distribution in the story” (Dube 2004:20). The men and women approach Jesus in the narrative differently; Jairus for example presents his problem straight to Jesus while the woman comes secretly (Dube 2004:20). “Clearly, the woman lacks words, rather in a typical gendered manner she speaks in action. It is only after Jesus had searched for her, that she comes forward and makes a confession, telling the whole truth” (Dube 2004:21). This illustrates the position of women struggling for a voice

in the termination of pregnancy debate in Malawi. Their voices need to be identified they need help in taking action against laws and biblical texts that are used to restrict their body rights. The CBS can serve as a platform through which these voices can be identified. Rap music, in this regard, can be a tool through which the women's concerns, challenges and experiences in the termination of pregnancy context can be projected.

#### **4.3.5. Blood and Reproduction in the Bible and African Culture: Purity and Boundaries**

According to Bruce Malina (1981:125), "purity is specifically about the general cultural map of social time and space, about arrangements within the space thus defined, and especially about the boundaries separating the inside from the outside." As a result, in order for set-apartness to be perceived, sacred lines are necessary (Malina 1981:125). Set-apartness in this regard means to experience something sacred (Malina 1981:125). However, exclusiveness is not something that is experienced in every human relationship (Malina 1981:125).

Richard Horsley makes an interesting point about the woman in Mark 5:25-34 regarding the issue of blood and purity. Pointing to the ancient Israelite laws as presented in Leviticus 15:19-30 on the menstrual discharge of women, "a woman is neither inhumanly restricted nor socially ostracized" (Horsley 2001:209). The hand of a woman does not transmit impurity based on the rulings about her beddings and where she sits; she is not excluded from her home and normal interactions with other human beings (Horsley 2001:209). Careful consideration of the stories of the woman and the twelve year old girl in Mark does not indicate that the laws given in Leviticus 15 were in mind (Horsley 2001:209). Scott Spencer points out that:

The main restrictions would have been against her entering the temple, having sex with her husband, or having someone touch her bed or something she's sat on... The fact is, none of these limitations has any relevance to the woman's case in Mark 5(2004:59).

Speaking of the African context, there are not many symbols that are as powerful as blood in African cultures; blood signifies "the presence of life, and when spilled, a sure precursor of death... Blood is associated with power in both negative and positive ways" (Lemarquand 2004:197). The significance of the symbol of blood, especially in sacrificial circumstances, explains why the story of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice on the cross has been meaningful in some parts of the African context (Lemarquand 2004:197).

Anything that is not clean or pure does not belong, it causes confusion to the system because it breaks boundaries (Malina 1981:125). “The sacred and profane, then, would be subsets of purity rules dealing with relations of exclusivity” (Malina 1981:125). Boundaries then bring anxiety and conflict and satisfaction and fulfilment at the same time – they are ambiguous (Malina 1981:126).

Menstrual blood is very significant in Africa. According to Lemarquand (2004:199), menstrual blood symbolizes positive and negative power dimensions; “menstruation is seen as good and natural, a sign of health and a foreshadowing of new life.” Menstruation is associated with maturity and bravery, but also considered dangerous on the other hand due to the taboos of some African societies (Lemarquand 2004:199). As a consequence of menstrual blood being seen as dangerous, Lemarquand points out that:

The sacred but defiling nature of menstrual blood has often caused the exclusion of women from religious leadership, from participation in religious events, and even from regular participation in or contact with the community or the family during monthly bleeding. If regular menstrual bleeding results in such restrictions, irregular menstrual bleeding could leave a woman almost totally isolated. A person in such a situation would be relegated to the margins of society (2004:201).

#### **4.4. Literary Analysis of Mark 5:25-34**

At this point, I focus more on the text of Mark 5:25-34. This involves discussion of the narrative elements that form part of this text. In this case, this section will be a detailed literary analysis of the structure, the narrative point of view, the plot, the setting and the characters in this text. A summary of this narrative will open the analysis and a reflection of the narrative will come in the end.

##### **4.4.1. Summary of the Narrative**

The events of this story begin when Jesus is on the way to heal Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:22-24). Jairus pleads, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that

she will be healed and live” and Jesus went with him (Mark 5:23, 24, NIV). A woman who had suffered from bleeding for twelve years was part of the crowd that followed Jesus (v. 25). Her condition got worse in spite of seeing many doctors and spending all she had (v. 26).

She comes behind Jesus and touches his cloak upon hearing about Him as she thought, “If I just touch His clothes, I will be healed” (Mark 5:27, 28, NIV). She stopped bleeding immediately “and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering” (Mark 5:29, NIV).

Jesus notices that power has gone out of him and He turns around in the crowd and asks for who had touched Him (v.30). His disciples ask Him a reasonable answer asking how Jesus could ask such a question when He could see for Himself that there were a lot of people around Him (v.31). Jesus keeps on looking and the woman – knowing that she was the one who touched Him – comes out and falls at His feet and tells Him what she had done (v 32, 33). And Jesus says to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering” (Mark 5:34, NIV).

#### **4.4.2. Structure**

The Gospel of Mark is made up of two parts that complement each other (Harrington 2002:12). The first part (Mark 1:14 – 8:30) has more to do with the identity of Jesus, with emphasis on his miracles and the second part (Mark 8:31 – 16:8) “is concerned with the messianic destiny of Jesus: a way of suffering and death” (Harrington 2002:12). The narrative of Mark 5:25-34, in the Gospel of Mark falls under a section where “Mark places a group of miracle stories that reveal Jesus’ awesome power over all the elements that cause fear and distress in human life” (Healy 2008:94).

Emphasis in this second part of this gospel is on the teachings of Jesus which point to his disciples recognising him as Messiah and the suffering this comes with (Harrington 2002:12). This is the predominant aspect of Mark’s Christology and understanding of discipleship: “suffering Messiahship and suffering discipleship” (Harrington 2002:8).

Structure involves determining the beginning and ending of a literary unit (Olson 2010:23). The story of the woman in Mark 5:25-34 appears to be part of a larger narrative; it seems to be a part of a series of narratives in the Gospel of Mark. Mark 5 itself looks like a combination of

three different stories – the story of the demon possessed man (v1-20), the woman (v25-34) and the 12 year old girl (v35-43). Harrington notes that the “sandwich” technique is a feature of Mark’s writing style (2002:78). Focusing more on the story of the woman and the 12 year old girl, Harrington argues that, “nowhere else does an insertion so clearly separate two parts of a story as it does in 5:21-43 (21-24a [24b-34] 35-43] (Harrington 2002:78). Each “sandwich” unit is constructed carefully and should be read as it is (Harrington 2002:78). Meaning that, wherever a unit is placed, it put there for a specific reason, moving the units around may distort the overall meaning that the author intended.

Witherington makes another argument which contradicts Harrington’s understanding. According to Witherington, the “sandwich” technique is clear in the Gospel of Mark, but this technique does not feature in this narrative (2001:184). This is so because “the delay caused by the healing of the woman is integral to the Jairus story” (Witherington 2001:184). Witherington adds that the narrative is historical in nature, which is marked by the unusual case of a Jewish official Jairus who believes in Jesus (2001:184).

The story of the woman can be read as part of the larger narrative. This is so because the woman’s encounter with Jesus comes directly in the middle of Jesus’ journey to Jairus’ house and disturbs the flow of Jairus’ story. However, it is necessary to point out that the story of the woman can stand alone and be read as a narrative on its own. This is why I am reading in it in isolation with the stories that surround it.

#### **4.4.3. Narrative Point of View**

This involves discerning the voice of the narrator in the narrative and the dialogue between particular characters within the story (Olson 2010:23) It is about how the characters and the narrator relate with one another (Olson 2010:23). Narrative point of view also involves rhetoric: the art of persuasion (Malbon 2008:39). “By the way the story is told, the implied author persuades the implied reader first to understand and then to share and extend the story’s levels of meaning” (Malbon 2008:39). Mark’s rhetoric involves juxtaposition – where scenes are placed over and against each other in order to draw out comparison, contrast and insight (Malbon 2008:39). Careful consideration of the interplay of the different elements that make



up the text enables one to be able to find meaning and interpret the text comprehensively (Olson 2010:24).

The narrator in Mark 5:25-34 – when the story is read with the grain (as it is) – tells the story in such a way as to show the power of Jesus over sickness. Jesus is at the very centre of the narrative when the story is read in this manner. He has powers and the whole crowd is following Him. The theme of faith seems to be the one that drives the narrative. This is shown by the woman's determination to touch Jesus' cloak in order to be healed in verse 27 and 28. It is underlined by the remark that Jesus makes that, "your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mark 5:34). It seems the narrator is persuading readers of the importance of having faith in Jesus, which results in freedom from suffering.

#### **4.4.4. Plot**

This is about tracing developments and movements within a narrative from beginning to the end (Olson 2010:23). One has to note where changes, conflicts, interruptions, suspense, resolutions etc. take in the text (Olson 2010:23). Plot according to Malbon is about what happens in the narrative, why it happens and what happens after that (2008:38). "The events and actions of a story, its plot, regularly involve conflict; indeed conflict (not necessarily violent conflict) is at the heart of most stories" (Harrington 2002:12). Mark 5:25-34 is no different in this regard.

Poetic texts do not tend to have one distinct plot, but in some cases "have subunits with some plot development within them" (Olson 2010:23). Mark 5:25-34 presents itself in this manner. It can be broken down into three sections:

- Exposition: the woman seeking redemption from her suffering (v25-29).
- Complication: the woman's fear of Jesus' reaction (v30-33). Direct speech – from the woman's thoughts, the disciples and Jesus slows things down – draws more attention and focus on the narrative.
- Resolution: the woman is granted freedom from her suffering (v34).

#### 4.4.5. Settings

This is about where and when things happen in the text (Malbon 2008:36). It is about internal time and space in the text, not external (Malbon 2008:36). The land and the Sea are significant in the Gospel of Mark according to Elizabeth Malbon:

The opposition LAND vs SEA is probably the most dramatic topographical contrast of the Gospel of Mark. As an opposition that is both natural and basic, LAND vs SEA implicitly underlies the narrative as a whole... The Sea of Galilee is central to the spatial movements of the Markan Jesus. Jesus calls his first disciples while “passing along by the Sea of Galilee” (1:16). Jesus often encounters the crowds on the land “besides the sea” (2:13; 3:7, 9; 4:1; 5:21). Physically, the sea is a barrier between the land of Galilee and foreign lands on its eastern shore, but Jesus easily crosses this barrier (4:35; 5:1, 21; 8:10; 8:13). At certain points in Mark, the opposition LAND vs SEA comes to explicit expression: at 4:1, Jesus is on the Sea, the crowd is on the land; at 6:47, the disciples are on the sea, Jesus is on the land(1991:99).

In terms of space – when read as part of the larger narrative of Mark 5 – the events of Mark 5:25-34 take place on the other side of the lake from Gerasa, where Jesus heals a man who was possessed by demons (Mark 5:1, 21). Jesus is on the way to Jairus’ house at this point (Mark 5:24).

In the case of time, events in Mark 5 appear to happen in the same sequence of events. Each event takes place right after the other following the movement of Jesus in the text. The narrative (Mark 5) moves from Jesus healing the demon possessed man, through to him healing the woman on the way to Jairus’ house in the end. It seems as if everything happened in one day considering how quick things move through-out the text. Jesus’ encounter with the woman is the only moment in the text where things slowdown in between Jesus arriving from Gerasa to when He proceeds to Jairus’ house after healing the woman.

#### **4.4.6. Characters**

Characters are one of the obvious elements in a narrative (Malbon 2008:34). They are who the story is about and they are the ones who carry out actions in a narrative (Malbon 2008:34). Characters are central to the story world (Harrington 2002:15). “The narrator brings characters to life either as one “tells” the reader directly what characters are like or as one “shows” the characters by having them speak and act, or by having others talk about them and speak to them” (Harrington 2002:15). This is how characters are brought to life in the narrative (Malbon 2008:34).

Characters are not the same as people in literary terms (Harrington 2002:13). The narrator may choose to expose some characters fully or decide to let the audience inside them (Harrington 2002:13) – like how the narrator in the Gospel of Mark lets us inside the mind of the woman (Mark 5:28).

At this point, I will discuss the characters of the narrative in Mark 5:25-34. In this regard, I will look at Jesus, His disciples, the crowd and the woman.

##### **4.4.6.1. Jesus**

According to Horsley, Jesus is leading a renewal of Israel. Horsley (2001:101) notes that, being uninformed, we may not get why the healings and exorcisms of Jesus are so problematic to the leadership of His time; “Aren’t they simple acts of mercy?” Horsley adds that:

Far from simply accepting his role in the divine economy of salvation in passive resignation, Mark’s Jesus is on the offensive throughout the story, especially in his confrontation with the rulers and ruling institutions in Jerusalem(2001:102).

Harrington identifies Jesus as a dominant character because of his complex characterization (2002:68). “Jesus speaks and acts: what he says discloses his understanding of himself and of his mission; what he does reveals the extent of His authority from God” (Harrington 2002:16). Adding to the point that Jesus has authority, Jesus has power; He senses power flowing out of His body (Healy 2008:107). Jesus appears to be the main character in this narrative considering

the characteristics and abilities that He possesses, but in my view, He is not central to the story; He does not drive the action in the story. Jesus does not have full control over His power here (Miller 2004:59).

#### **4.4.6.2. The Disciples**

In the Gospel of Mark, discipleship – following Jesus – is understood as the main theme (Malbon 2000:41). Malbon (2000:41) adds that scholarly investigation on the theme of discipleship has often focused on how the disciples have been portrayed in the Gospel of Mark. “Certainly the disciples are chief among the followers of the Markan Jesus. And, equally certainly, they are fallible followers. The reason for this portrayal is to be sought in the author’s approach to the reader” (Malbon 2000:42). The twelve disciples are not the only followers of Jesus; a lot of other people follow Jesus in the Gospel of Mark (Malbon 2000:43). Discipleship, however, is not easy – this is marked by the ups and downs of the disciples in the Gospel of Mark (Malbon 2000:43). This suggests that the crowd that follows Jesus in Mark 5:25-34 are also disciples.

The disciples are at one point in the narrative in conversation with Jesus (Mark 5:31). They question Jesus’ common sense when He asks who touched Him when He was surrounded by a crowd of people (v.31). The narrator shows that the disciples do not know what they are talking about at this point. They fail to realize that, “what made the woman’s touch unlike that of all the others in the crowd was her faith” (Healy 2008:106).

#### **4.4.6.3. The Crowd**

The crowd in the Gospel of Mark is portrayed in the same way as the twelve disciples of Jesus (Malbon 2004:44) They have a positive and negative relationship with Jesus “and the crowd serves to complement the disciples in a composite portrait of the followers of Jesus. Jesus calls to himself both the disciples and the crowd” (Malbon 2000:44).

The crowd is not directly mentioned in Mark 5:25-34. There is a pointer, however, that they are moving with Jesus as He is on His way to Jairus' house in verse 24 of Mark 5. The actions of the crowd are driven by the movement of Jesus as they follow and press around Him (v.24). Healy claims that, "the surging crowd, which pushes against Jesus, conveys an impression of the chaos of humanity in an age of evil" (Healy 2008:57).

#### **4.4.6.4. Physicians**

According to Satoko Yamaguchi (2002:71), there were two types of health-care practitioners: physicians and folk-healers. In this regard:

A physician was a professionally trained and accredited person who practiced methods of diagnosis of and prescription for human ailments based on observation of the body.

A folk-healer was a person whose practice was "real and effective" but not accepted by everyone as legitimate (Yamaguchi 2002:71).

Yamaguchi points out that in the Gospels, Jesus was never referred to as "physician" "but is depicted as a folk-healer or prophet healer. The practices of professional physicians were considered medicine, while folk-healers were (and are) often degraded as magic or sorcery" (2002:71).

#### **4.4.6.5. The Woman**

The Woman's emergence from the crowd that followed Jesus gives evidence of women's presence in the crowd – this presence was generally obscured by androcentric language (Malbon 2000:50). The woman herself is "portrayed as severely stigmatized and ostracized in Jewish society" (Horsley 2001:208). Her emergence, however, distinguishes her from the other people in the crowd; she shows boldness because her faith is strong (Malbon 2000:51). Jesus' other healing encounters Jesus does something first in the process of healing; "in this one, he is utterly passive, while the initiative, action, and confirmation are all by the woman" (Horsley 2001:210). Malbon also has a similar understanding – "The healing of the hemorrhaging woman is unique in the Markan Gospel, however, in taking place solely at the woman's

initiative (5:28-29)” (Malbon 2000:51). In this regard, the healing is confirmed and attested by herself instead of others (Horsley 2001:210).

The narrative first portrays the woman as afflicted with sickness; she had been bleeding for 12 years (v.25). “This woman has experienced her life draining away, with the weakness and fatigue that usually accompany chronic bleeding” (Healy 2008:106). In this regard, the woman is ritually unclean according to the Law of Moses (Leviticus 15:25-27), anything she comes in contact with becomes unclean (Healy 2008:106).

The character of the woman is also portrayed as one who is afraid (v.33) considering how she responds to Jesus’ reaction after he feels power leave His body after she touches Him (v.31). Her fear of Jesus’ reaction is not surprising since, “by deliberately touching another person, she has just breached the rules regarding ritual impurity” (Healy 2008:107). By touching Jesus, she violates “the norms of proper submissive behaviour” (Dewey 1995:481). She claims healing and takes it without anyone’s permission (Dewey 1996:481). The narrative in this case presents the woman as one who is in desperate need of healing; her actions here show that she needs things to change in her life sooner than later. Branch (2013) sums all this up by pointing out that:

All these factors lead to this reasonable conclusion: Mark introduces this woman as lonely, isolated, impoverished, quite likely anaemic and possibly dying. Her condition appears hopeless and she is desperate. Most would think that she is better off dead.

This is how the character of the woman is brought out when the narrative is read constructively. One of the elements of a constructive literary approach (reader-centred) to a biblical text is the emphasis on the texts to be understood “on their own terms rather than imposing alien categories or assumptions from modern literary studies upon the biblical text” (Olson 2010:17). Reading just on the surface may keep one from having a deeper understanding of the text or a particular character in the text.

#### **4.4.7. Reflection**

I will now reflect on Mark 5:25-34. This reflection will focus more on the character of the woman in the text – especially on her encounter with Jesus. As pointed out, a constructive

reading of this text gives out a weak representation of the woman in the narrative. A deconstructive literary approach (text-centred) is necessary in order to have a deeper understanding of the woman and the important role that she plays in the text. According to Olson:

“Deconstruction involves a careful and detailed reading of a text, highlighting its internal complexity and the gaps and omissions that may be filled in with a variety of different meanings, many of which may be contradictory. Deconstruction involves teasing out and highlighting those details of a text that promote meanings and commitments that are in fundamental conflict with meanings and commitments that may appear at the surface of a text” (Olson 2010:20).

Branch’s analysis of the woman in the narrative reflects this contrast – constructive versus deconstructive – very well. “The text identifies her in terms of her gender, illness, covenant status, prolonged suffering and penury. Yet a careful reading reveals her stealth, desperation, courage and eloquence” (Branch, 2013). Careful reading presents the woman a strong character in the narrative – she is central because her actions drive the story, the actions of Jesus included.

Her courage is shown in verses 27 to 29. She decides to touch Jesus knowing that her actions were against the laws of her society – “the woman takes initiative in seeking healing from Jesus by struggling through the crowd to reach Him” (Miller 2004:58). It is easy for me to say, being a man, but this could be used as a source of encouragement for women to involve themselves in the discussions around the termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi. There is need to break barriers that stop them from participating by using the woman in Mark 5:25-34 as an example. The woman shows courage in order to confess the truth (v.33) (Miller 2004:60) and “far from reprimanding her for her boldness, Jesus reassures her, addressing her affectionately as daughter” (Healy 2008:107).

In this regard, the state and religious groups in Malawi need to follow Jesus’ example here. Women have to be at the centre of the discussions around termination of pregnancy; it is their bodies, therefore it should be their choices. “Feminists have advocated the right of women to freedom over their bodies and their sexuality. The accepted methods include choices in marriage and sexual orientation, control over reproductivity, and, of course, the freedom to make decisions” (Kanyoro, 2001:110). The termination of pregnancy laws are restrictive. Jesus

had no tolerance of restrictive regulations (Harrington 2002:79) – “He was concerned with people, intent on liberation from physical and social suffering. Jesus did not scold the woman for her “reprehensive” conduct. Instead, He commended her faith” (Harrington 2002:80). Jesus was prepared to help anyone – especially those who were vulnerable and marginalized (Witherington 2001:185). The state and religious groups also need to do the same for the women who are afraid to make a choice on termination of pregnancy due to the laws of the country and religious beliefs respectively.

Offering a feminist analysis, Dewey points out that, the woman’s action in the text may have helped Jesus in the narrative to free Himself from “the patriarchal assumptions and male privilege of ancient culture” (1995:481). Dewey makes another important point:

“The Markan Jesus creates a Jewish community that understands the realm of God as a whole, inclusive and without boundaries, not as the exclusive and separated realm protected by the Jewish officials. Since women were considered dangerously impure, their inclusion is a prime example of the Markan Jesus’ inclusiveness” (Dewey 1995:481).

It is the responsibility of the state and religious groups in Malawi to ensure that women are included and have the right to choose what to do with their bodies. Laws that regulate these choices need to be reformed or revoked in order for women to exercise their freedom.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the biblical text used for this study, Mark 5:25-34. Firstly, it has discussed some of the feminist readings of this text touching on issues of patriarchy and empowerment of women. This text has been analysed from a socio-historical perspective highlighting the estimated time of writing, the author and the intended audience of this text in the Gospel of Mark. In addition to this, the representation of women and issues of blood and purity in the Bible and the African context have also been discussed. Literary analysis of the narrative elements that form part of this text has followed in the end. The following chapter focuses on ideo-theological resources that can be used through this text in order to empower and liberate women in the context of termination of pregnancy in Malawi.



## **Chapter 5**

### **Ideo-theological Resources for Appropriation**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

As a reminder, the Tripolar method brings together the African context, a biblical text and ideological forms of dialogue between the African context and the biblical text (West, 2016). The second chapter of this paper discussed alternative ways of dealing with the issue of termination of pregnancy in Malawi against the rights-based approach. This chapter is about ideological resources I will be using for appropriation in the context of the termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi. This will involve a discussion of African feminist biblical hermeneutics and narrative method as ideological resources for appropriation in this context.

As a reader of the biblical text in the African context, I present myself as an ally of women struggling to find a voice in the termination of pregnancy debate in Malawi. African feminist biblical hermeneutics in this case serve as a platform for facilitating dialogue between the context of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill and the biblical text of Mark 5:25-34. I do not claim to speak for women in the termination of pregnancy bill context in Malawi since I do not know their bodily experiences as a man; my intention is to suggest ways through which women's voices can be heard.

It is important to note that the ideological pole in the Tripolar method can take various forms (West, 2016). In this case, I will suggest other additional resources for appropriation. Contextual Bible Study (CBS) and intercultural reading of biblical texts will be used in order to set up groups of women to build solidarity. In addition to this, art in the form of music will be suggested as a tool for education and liberation in Malawi.

## 5.2. African Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics

Nirmala Vasanthakumar defines biblical hermeneutics as:

A principle by which a biblical text is interpreted to make the message relevant to the modern situation. It takes into consideration the text and its context, as well as the reader and his or her context. If the former is taken seriously without the latter then we end up with an ancient text without any relevance for the present. If the latter is taken seriously without the former then we are in danger of advocating subjective interpretation (1997:43).

The context of global gender injustice contributes the struggles of women in Africa (Kanyoro 1997:177). “African women’s feminist theology roots its relevance to the continent by responding to some of the issues that are oppressive to women in Africa” (Kanyoro 1997:177). In African feminist biblical hermeneutics, the African context is the centre of biblical interpretation, this means that everything in the process of interpretation is influenced by the world-view and life experience of that African context (West, 2016). This involves reading and analysing biblical texts from an African perspective (Adamo, 2015). In this case, as an example, culture informs one’s interpretation of the biblical text (Kanyoro, 2009). Social experience is also another factor that determines how readers interpret biblical texts (Dube, 2009).

In this sense, my world-view and life experience as an African influences my understanding and interpretation of Mark 5:25-34. Musa Dube (2009) in an article titled, ‘Fifty Years of Bleeding: A Storytelling Reading of Mark 5:25-43’ draws from gender-feminist and contextual biblical reading lens when reading in order to locate a woman in the centre of the African story as “one who defies death by continuing to sing from the many graves”. This resonates with the Malawian context. Research has shown that a lot of women are dying in Malawi through unsafe abortions due to the restriction of termination of pregnancy enforced by the law (HEARD, 2016).

In this regard, using the African feminist biblical hermeneutics framework, Mark 5:25-34 is being used in order to portray – and start a discussion about – the reality of social bondage caused by the abortion law in Malawi. I should however point out, as mentioned earlier, that as a man, I do not know and cannot understand the experiences of women struggling for a voice

in the termination of pregnancy debate in Malawi. African feminist biblical hermeneutics in this case only helps me in terms of supporting these women in trying to find that voice using the text of Mark 5:25-34.

### **5.3. Narrative Method**

The narrative method has been used by African women theologians as an effective instrument for critiquing oppressive systems in African religio-culture (Phiri and Nadar 2006:8). Telling stories help in terms of identifying cultural and religious aspects that exploit women (Phiri and Nadar 2006:8). “Stories can be used to engender suspicion of master narratives” (Nadar, 2014). My use of Mark 5:25-34 in this regard is to point out how cultural and religious laws in the text and in the Malawian context bind women from having voices and choices on matters related to their bodies.

As a man, I cannot read and interpret a narrative in the same way that the women struggling for a voice in the termination of pregnancy debate can. I believe our experiences are different. Phiri and Nadar point out that there is a need to theorize women’s experiences instead of just writing about them (2006:8). This is to be done in order to create space for women’s voices to be heard in all spheres of society (Phiri and Nadar 2006:8). Stories generate a longing for change which can lead to working towards transformation in society (Nadar, 2014). The narrative method in this case – using Mark 5:25-34 – serves as a tool for activism in the quest for women’s voices to be heard in the context of termination of pregnancy in Malawi.

### **5.4. Contextual Bible Study and Intercultural Reading**

According to Hans de Wit, the focus on bible reading as a tool for transformation can be found and encountered in the methods of “see, judge, act” and Contextual Bible Study respectively (2015:53). Gerald West (2014) understands Contextual Bible Study as “a South African contribution to the trajectory of biblical liberation hermeneutics.” De Wit asks whether a cross-border reading of the biblical text can “result in reading for justice, in a life-giving, instead of a life-taking, process” (De Wit 2015:53). In regard to the context of the termination of

pregnancy bill debate in Malawi, this proposes a reading of the Bible between groups of women seeking free access to abortion.

Regarding intercultural reading of the bible and its significance as an ideo-theological resource for liberation and transformation, de Wit says that:

We use the concept of culture, because it represents context and the awareness that what people do with their Scriptures is deeply and directly informed by their circumstances and cultures and also that what they do with their Scriptures exerts a formative impact on those circumstances. We want to listen to what happens when the poor and the rich, the healthy and the ill, the victims and the perpetrator, and the colonizer and colonized read together. We want to see whether the Bible texts that very frequently become places of conflict can also become places of encounter and reconciliation (2015:54).

Women's experiences and their contexts need to be put into careful consideration in order to understand their needs in the context of termination of pregnancy in Malawi. Through history, biblical engagement with different cultural contexts has led to transformation (Mijoga 2000:374). Mijoga gives an example of a study on sacraments and sexuality conducted in Malawi. In this study:

It was observed that fewer women than men took part in the Holy Communion. The study showed that cultural practices, including traditional understandings of menstrual uncleanness, prevented women from taking part in this celebration. But after a series of contextual Bible studies on this and related issues, the situation changed... In this case, one can conclude that the contextual Bible studies were liberative to women (2000:374).

Dialogue through contextual and intercultural bible reading amongst women in this case can open up a powerful space for their voices to be heard and for some of the cultural and religious traditions to be interrogated. The process of reading the Bible and the types of action that come out of it must transform reality (West, 2014). Having women reading together in solidarity can be an important step towards achieving transformation. It could be a significant step towards the reformation – and even renouncement – of the abortion law in Malawi. Danie van Zyl notes that, “transformation starts with the individual within the context of the reading group. Every group is uniquely composed of ever so many unique individuals” (2015:120). This helps to realize that there is not only one way of looking at things; the government and religious

environments could learn how to tolerate difference of ideas and experiences from women once their voices have been heard.

Diversity in this regard brings about different perspectives that make the discussions more meaningful (van Zyl 2015:122). To add on this:

Contextual Bible Study shares with other forms of liberation hermeneutics the inclusion of so-called ‘ordinary’ readers of the Bible, privileging both the non-scholarly dimensions of ordinary readers and the contexts of a particular sector of ordinary readers, the poor and marginalised. Like other forms of liberation hermeneutics, Contextual Bible Study is dialogical, including not only the dialogue between context and the biblical text but also a dialogue between ‘ordinary’ and ‘scholarly’ readers as they together – in some way – dialogue with the Bible (West, 2014).

Contextual Bible Study focuses on the marginalized (West, 2014). Women’s voices and experiences should be the focus of discussions around matters of termination of pregnancy in Malawi. “A critique of gender socialization must begin from the perspective of women because women’s condition has been generally overlooked in analyses of the human condition” (Colker, 1992). Women reading in solidarity can have the potential of taking control of the termination of pregnancy discourse in Malawi. Their knowledge can be used in the process of interpretation (West, 2014). This knowledge together with their experiences and voices uttered could have a huge impact in the process of the reformation of the abortion law in Malawi.

## **5.5. Music: Rap Song**

Art can be a very important tool for activism and transformation. Speaking of the impact of artists through their art, Kim Berman points out that:

The ability to be truly creative, to imagine that which is not there, and to have the skills to bring what is imagined into being, is a fundamentally empowering capacity, one that gives people agency and opens possibilities for mobility (2013:5).

Music is one of the major aspects of art and William Danaher (2010) identifies it as “a key component of social movements.” Music is part of culture and serves as an important tool for unity “when participants move beyond free spaces to more contested ones” (Danaher, 2010).

In the context of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill debate in Malawi, music can be composed and be used for activism in order to bring awareness on the realities of abortion and the importance of the reformation of the current abortion law. In the quest for transformation, those seeking change need to contend with those who do not (Danaher, 2010). Music provides space where this can be achieved. According to Danaher (2010):

Contemporary social movements still find free spaces where music inspires emotions; people express themselves, and collective identity among potential adherents forms new social movement cultures. For instance, the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning) movement and the environmental movement challenge the status quo by meeting in protected spaces as well as through public protest. Just as in past social movements, these use music to attract and retain participants. Collective identity still arises when people act to take advantage of opportunity structures in society or react to societal constrictions. As these processes move forward, music provides a means for solidarity around shared causes and resistance from those who prefer the status quo.

In this regard, I propose using hip-hop or rap music as another resource for appropriation in the context of the termination of pregnancy context in Malawi for education and liberation purposes. Rap music, however, might not be appeal to older people; it is very popular among young people in my experience. In this case, it is the message that music carries which is the main point here:

Music is most useful as a tool for establishing collective identity when people can relate to it. Social movements that marshal pre-existing culture via its music to elicit emotion and form and maintain collective identity have often been successful in achieving their goals (Danaher, 2010).

Creating a rap song speaking about abortion could potentially speak for – and be received by – both young and old women who are struggling for a voice in the termination of pregnancy context in Malawi. It can reach people everywhere with its message. Rap music has some criticisms I should point out, in spite of its success, popularity and reach:

While the rap music industry has been lauded for its financial success and international popularity, there have also been criticisms, some valid and others misguided. A major

criticism of some rap music is its apparent appetite for violent, sexist, and misogynistic images, and what many view as glorification of drugs and alcohol (Tyson, 2006).

The music videos and the lyrics of some of the rap music out there portray a bad reflection of this genre. The argument here is for one to realize the potential that the impact of rap music can have when used in a positive manner. Rap music is a useful tool for critical and creative engagement with the realities of marginalized people (Haupt, 2003). “The use of hip-hop as a liberatory practice is rooted in the long history of the Black freedom struggle and the quest for self-determination for oppressed communities around the world” (Akom, 2009). Rap music in the context of the termination of pregnancy debate in Malawi can be used in this regard in order to encourage and empower women to speak out and to support women’s rights of choice around the issue of abortion. Rap music, in this way, can bring awareness about the challenges that women face in order to access free and safe abortion; music would serve as a tool for liberation in this regard.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

Ideo-theological resources for appropriation in the context of termination of pregnancy in Malawi have been the main focus of this chapter. As a reader of a biblical text in the African context, I have discussed African feminist biblical hermeneutics and narrative method as resources for appropriation. CBS and intercultural reading and rap music have been suggested as resources of appropriation in order to engage with the context of termination of pregnancy in Malawi. These resources have the potential to bring solidarity, awareness and liberation in this context. The following chapter presents ideas and notes for the format of the CBS and rap song.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Notes and Ideas for CBS and Rap Song**

#### **6.1. Introduction**

This chapter is an analysis of ideas and notes for a CBS and rap song drawn from all previous chapters. CBS and a rap song have been identified as ideo-theological resources of engagement for liberation and empowerment of women struggling to find a voice in the termination of pregnancy discourse in Malawi. In this case, I will briefly conceptualize how these ideo-theological resources would be formulated for this context. The role of appropriation of biblical resources for empowerment and liberation will be discussed at the end.

#### **6.2. Notes for CBS**

According to Gerald West, CBS is a useful way of reading the Bible with ordinary readers (1993:11). There are four things that the CBS process commits to. Drawing from West's analysis, the CBS is committed to a) reading the Bible from the perspective of the marginalized in their particular contexts, b) reading the Bible together with others in community, c) reading the Bible critically and d) personal and societal transformation of people's realities through the CBS (1993:12). It is important, however, to note that these commitments are not final and prescribed (West 1993:12). This suggests that CBS is flexible; there is no one particular way of carrying out this process.

##### **6.2.1. Facilitation of a CBS**

The CBS process does not just happen by itself; it has to be facilitated (West 1993:24). "It is a collaborative process and therefore requires a form of leadership that facilitates" (Ujamaa,



2013). The facilitator plays a key role in the CBS process (Ujamaa, 2013). I will at this point discuss some of the roles of the facilitator.

The facilitator is responsible for encouraging group participation (West 1993:24). CBS involves a participation and discussion style (Ujamaa, 2013). This could be crucial in a CBS conducted with women struggling for a voice in the termination of pregnancy discourse in Malawi. This could be a space where their concerns would be voiced out. It is where their voices could finally be heard. “The facilitator is just one voice so the group must be allowed to express its voices” (Ujamaa, 2013).

The facilitator should be able to manage conflict (West 1993:24). Conflict can be useful to a certain extent but has to be managed (Ujamaa, 2013). It is important in this regard to be familiar with the backgrounds of the participants (West 1993:24) and the social realities of the group (Ujamaa, 2013). Having knowledge of women’s need to have a voice on termination of pregnancy in Malawi could be important to the CBS process in this case.

The facilitator should be able to train others to become facilitators themselves (West 1993:24). Any person can facilitate the CBS process as long as “they are willing to learn to be enablers and not dominators” (West 1993:24). Facilitation does not need one to have a particular qualification (Ujamaa, 2013). This shows that facilitation does not require one to have a high level of education. Women from areas where education is limited can also facilitate. This can enable them – once trained on how to facilitate – to form groups in their context and work together in solidarity. These women’s groups can be places for empowerment and liberation in the quest for having voices on matters concerning termination of pregnancy.

### **6.2.2. Construction of a Contextual Bible Reading**

At this point, I will suggest how the text of Mark 5:25-34 would be read together with a group of women struggling for a voice on matters concerning termination of pregnancy in Malawi. Construction of the reading process in CBS involves identifying a biblical text, choosing the mode in which this text will be read, formulating questions and selecting how to respond (West 1993:75).

West points out that reading any biblical text is one of the challenges of CBS (1993:72). It is a tendency of ordinary readers to read the Bible selectively; “so a significant contribution of trained readers is to facilitate the reading of any and every text” (West 1993:72). As far as identifying a biblical text is concerned, the CBS would use the biblical text of Mark 5:25-34. This is the text that has been recognised in this paper as a tool for empowering and empowering women struggling for a voice on matters concerning termination of pregnancy in Malawi.

The type of text chosen, the type of participants and the type of resources used for critical reading are among some of things that determine the mode in which the text is read (West 1993:73). The mode of reading for the CBS would heavily base on the text itself drawing from the literary analysis of Mark 5:25-34 done in the previous chapter. West argues that a socio-historical perspective would be necessary to the CBS process for a gospel like Mark (1993:73).

The mode of reading then dictates the type of questions asked in the critical reading of the identified biblical text (West 1993:75). According to West, who the participants of the CBS are substantially shape the questions asked of the biblical text:

It is their questions which should frame and inform our reading of the text. Questions “from below” should frame our reading in the sense that we come to the text conscious of the needs, questions, and interests of the poor and oppressed (1993:75).

### **6.2.3. Questions for the Contextual Bible Reading of Mark 5:25-34**

At this point, I will attempt to formulate questions that could be in a CBS with a group of women struggling for a voice on matters concerning termination of pregnancy in Malawi. I should point out that I am not an expert in this regard; I have not experience of facilitating a CBS whatsoever. This is just a rough idea of how these questions would look. These questions are related to the literary unit of Mark 5:25-34 and its relation with texts that immediately surround it, the character of the woman in the narrative, the character of Jesus in the narrative and what the text says to us in our time now.

As a facilitator, I would first ask the group to each read Mark 5:25-34 separately. I would then ask one to read Mark 5:1-20 and another to read Mark 5:35-43 out loud on behalf of the group.

This give literary context (West 1993:9) – focussing on Mark 5:25-34 as a literary composition. Determining where a text begins and ends gives a sense of what the text means (Ujamaa, 2013).

These are the questions that would follow:

1. What do you think about Mark 5:25-34 and where it is located?
2. Is it related with the texts that immediately surround it?
3. If yes, how are they related?
4. If not, why do you think they are not related?

We would then move on to questions about the woman and Jesus in the narrative. As pointed out in the previous section, a socio-historical perspective would be appropriate for reading the Gospel of Mark (West 1993:73). This involves focusing on the world in which the text was produced (West 1993:9). Socio-historical information enhances the picture of the biblical text (Ujamaa, 2013). Pausing and re-reading particular verses would slow down the reading process and offer time for more reflection.

These are the questions that would be asked about the woman:

1. What do you think was the social status of the woman in her time?
2. What do you make of her suffering?
3. Why does she approached Jesus?
4. Read verse 29. Does this answer the previous question?
5. What does verse 33 say to you?

About Jesus:

1. How is Jesus portrayed in this story?
2. What do you make of his reaction in verse 30?
3. Why do you think Jesus calls the woman ‘daughter’ in verse 34?

After dialogue here, we would then move on to questions related to our time now. This involves “appropriating the text to present context” (West 1993:43). The questions prompt action; they are geared towards transformation in this respect.

The questions to be asked would be:

1. What does this story say today?
2. Who is like the woman in the story in our time?
3. Who is Jesus like?
4. What do you think of the disciples' response to Jesus in verse 31 and who are they like today?
5. What do the actions of the woman, Jesus, and the disciples in the story mean to us now?

I can see now that this process would take time; patience would be a key factor moving towards completion and achievement of goals. I will now discuss notes for a rap song in the following section.

### **6.3. Ideas for the Rap Song**

This is a brief discussion of the message that the rap song would carry. I will not set out the lyrics of the song in this regard. The song would mainly touch on calling for the recognition, empowerment and liberation of women in the termination of pregnancy context in Malawi.

The song would serve as a tool for education and activism. It would be used in order to bring awareness concerning the reality of women's high mortality rate due to unsafe abortion. It would be important that some people in the country know about this. It would call for women's recognition in the termination of pregnancy debate in Malawi. It has been pointed out in this paper that women are struggling for a voice on matters concerning termination of pregnancy in Malawi. The song would speak about the need for women to be at the forefront of dialogues – it is their bodies that bear the effects of the restrictions set out by the government and some religious groups.

Making reference to the woman in Mark 5:25-34, the song would carry a message for empowerment. It would highlight the role of the woman in the process of the ending of her suffering. The woman shows bravery and this would be used to encourage women struggling for a voice on matters concerning termination of pregnancy in Malawi to take initiative for their voices to be heard.

Liberation of these women would involve transformation of restrictive laws and regulations that hinder access to safe abortion services. The song would speak for women to be given the right to bodily autonomy; women should have the freedom to choose where and when to terminate their pregnancy. The song would also speak about giving women access to safe abortion services without any restrictions. This would in a sense would play a part in reducing the number of deaths related with termination of pregnancy.

#### **6.4. The Role of Appropriation of Biblical Resources for Empowerment and Liberation**

Continuous dialogue between a biblical text and its context on one hand and between readers and their context on the other is required for a critical appropriation (West 1993:76). This enables and provides space for activism. In terms of appropriating Mark 5:25-34, Marie-Eloise Rosenblatt looks at gender, ethnicity, and legal considerations in relation to the woman in the narrative. She speaks of appreciating women as good examples in the text even though they are not given names, identity, and ethnicity in many cases (Rosenblatt 2000:137). Rosenblatt argues that:

A redemptive and transformative reading requires a willingness to challenge certain versions of “revelation.” Feminist exegetes counter-read versions of Gospel interpretation which present silent submission to male authority as the loyalty test of women’s faith in Jesus. This reading opposes patriarchal notions that are aimed at subordinating women in the Gospels (2000:137).

This type of reading could be adopted in a CBS. CBS creates space where in order for a biblical text to be used successfully, it first needs to be properly examined. This involves a detailed analysis of the text socio-historically and literary. The issues of gender, identity and ethnicity that Rosenblatt brings up can be used as an example to show women struggling for a voice on matters concerning termination of pregnancy in Malawi that they are not alone. Issues of oppression exist in the Bible as well. CBS and a rap song can provide a platform where Mark 5:25-34 can be used to empower and liberate women in Malawi as suggested in the previous section.

Jacqueline Lapsley offers three ways of reading stories about women in the Bible (2005: 1). These focus on paying attention to the words of women, the perspectives of the narrator and

the worldview of the text (Lapsley 2005:1). The book suggests ways that can deepen people's theological reading of Scripture (Lapsley 2005:1). Lapsley says, "the strategies connect gender issues with ethical reflection that leads to deeper theological understanding" (Lapsley 2005:10). In this case, Lapsley argues that "the Bible does not offer a constructive resource for ethical reflection on gender issues (Lapsley 2005:10). It is up to us to find ways of appropriation – like CBS and rap song – through which biblical meaning can come across.

Some ordinary readers of scripture may be ignorant about theological debates on the Bible, but most are likely to be involved (Village 2007:29). The Bible as far as my argument is concerned is not to be used to justify marginalization, but should be read in ways that are life affirming. This enables readers who are marginalized to have the freedom to personally choose where they stand on ethical issues according to what meaning they draw from scripture. CBS serves as space where women's voices about termination of pregnancy can be heard and a rap song as a channel through which their concerns are voiced out.

## **6.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has been a presentation of notes and ideas for a CBS and rap song in the context of termination of pregnancy in Malawi. In this sense, I have suggested a contextual bible reading of Mark 5:25-34 with a group of women struggling for a voice on matters concerning termination of pregnancy in Malawi. I have formulated the questions that would be engaged if I was to facilitate a CBS in this context. I have also discussed ideas for the message that a rap song would carry. The rap song would point to the need for women's voices to be recognised and reference Mark 5:25-34 for empowerment and liberation – to speak on the need for women's bodily autonomy and access to safe abortion services without restrictions. In the end, the role of appropriation of biblical resources for empowerment and liberation has been discussed.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion**

#### **7.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapters, it has been argued that public healthcare and reproductive justice approaches are more suitable ways of tackling matters concerning termination of pregnancy other than rights-based approaches. African feminist biblical hermeneutics has been used in order to critique the way biblical texts are used in the termination of pregnancy discourse in order to restrict women from accessing safe abortion services. CBS and a rap song have been suggested as additional ideo-theological resources – on top of African feminist biblical hermeneutics and narrative method – for empowerment, liberation and educational purposes in Malawi on matters concerning termination of pregnancy.

#### **7.2. Approaches for Positive Interaction and Support for Women**

There are different ways through which people have engaged with the termination of pregnancy issue in Malawi. The response of the EAM highlighted in the second chapter, for example, presents a negative response that does not support women seeking access to safe abortion. This section recommends approaches that can be adopted in order to ensure that interaction with and support for women seeking access to safe abortion services in Malawi is done in a positive manner.

##### **7.2.1. Post-colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible (PCFIB)**

According to Musa Dube:

Post-colonial theoretical frameworks were mainly developed from the analysis of nineteenth and twentieth century literature, upon the realization that texts were powerful

tools for either buttressing or counteracting imperial powers. Given that imperialism has been a recurring phenomenon in the history of the world, post-colonial applicability to various other classical texts in the human history is legitimate. Its application should, indeed, open new ways to understand most of the canonized classical texts, as to how they may reflect the imperial values of their origins and how these texts have functioned in various empires that have risen and fallen in history (2010:92).

Different people use the Bible in a different manner at different times in history (Dube 2010:89). Hilary Mijoga points out that the Church used the Bible for positive change during the referendum in Malawi in 1992 – 1994 (2000:375). “It was observed that engagement with the biblical text was, from the beginning, a central feature in the struggle for social and political change in Malawi from 1992” (Mijoga 2000:375). The EAM has not used the bible in the same way in the context of the termination of pregnancy bill debate in Malawi now. This difference in ways of reading and how texts are used calls for the interpretation of different texts in the Bible “to be integrated into academic biblical studies” (Dube 2010:90). “The biblical story itself invites its readers to identify with it and to act it out in history” (Dube 2010:90). Hans de Wit points out that:

The question concerning the relation between Bible reading and transformation touches on the practice of millions of people around the world who, read, interpret, use, and otherwise engage with the Bible on a daily basis. It is precisely because of this global presence of the Bible and the endless procession of people who interact with it, each on her or his own way, that posing the question about the effect of that interaction is so urgent. (2015:54).

Religious communities in this case should not prescribe meaning to biblical texts but should understand that people draw different meanings from texts and use them differently. “Early feminist readers insisted on women’s experience as a valid interpretive framework” (Dube 2010:91). The biblical texts that the EAM uses against termination of pregnancy could mean something else to different women. The question in this regard is how to implement post-colonial ideas into the liberation discourse (Dube 2010:95). Dube proposes that, “it is imperative for feminist inclusive readings to be more suspicious of imperialism legitimation” (Dube 2010:95). This helps in disregarding any restrictive ideas and interpretations that could be influenced by colonialism. Dube makes a good point here in relation to disregarding religious ideas and interpretations of colonial influence:



Conscience awareness of the fact that biblical texts were born in an imperialist setting and have been unique in sponsoring imperialist agendas over different times and people needs to be integrated in our feminist reading for liberation... To read for decolonization, therefore, is to consciously resist the exploitative forces of imperialism, to affirm the denied differences, and to seek liberating ways of interdependence in our multicultural and post-colonial world (2010:98).

PCFIB is a useful resource in this regard because it encourages “reading, imagining, and retelling biblical stories in negotiation with other religious stories in the post-colonial era” (Dube 2010:99). This allows a refreshment or rejuvenation of the ideas or interpretations of biblical texts from religious communities. Religious communities – in the context of the termination of pregnancy bill debate in Malawi – need to realize that these are different times. What particular biblical texts used to mean during colonial times is different from they mean in the post-colonial context now. Through PCFIB, texts that were used to silence women in the colonial times, could be used to bring freedom to women now.

Paul Decock provides an example of this analysis:

A 21st-century reading of a biblical text, even a highly sophisticated historical reconstruction, is not identical with a first-century Christian reading. It remains a particular 21st-century reading which to a lesser or greater extent has extended its horizon to understand its own position in the stream of history and to understand the position of the ancient text in that wider history. Understanding a text from the past is therefore always an actualization of the meaning of the text in terms of the concerns and value judgments of the reader. The question then arises which actualizations can be considered as normative (2016:12).

The Church, in this case, should use the Bible in order to support – and not to oppress – women in need of access to safe healthcare services. The abortion law in Malawi needs to be reformed and the Church needs to make decisions that are in favour of the many women who could benefit from the reform. Regarding the role that the Church has to play, Laetus Lategan argues that:

Healthcare is to bring dignity to all people, especially the vulnerable. The Church has a role to play in the protection and upliftment of vulnerable people. This starts with

being a Church that reaches out to people where they are, and that does not wait for people to come to the Church first (Lategan, 2017).

### **7.2.2. Love and Compassion**

As a society of which religion has much influence, love and compassion should be among some of the things that we should strive for. In the Christian community, we learn through scripture that “God is full of compassion” (Psalm 116:5, NIV) and it urges us to clothe ourselves with compassion, among other things (Colossians 3:12). We are also learn to love one another as God has loved us for everyone to know that we are God’s disciples (John 13:34, 35). “Theology does a relatively better job in exploring the aspirations that we should seek for society” (Colker, 1992). In the context of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill in Malawi, love and compassion should be shown to women in need of safe access to abortion. In this regard, the Church has to be at the forefront in support of the women who seek abortion; there should not be any room for discrimination. It is one of the duties of the Church to oversee the responsibility of the government on delivering healthcare and human rights (Lategan, 2017). “The Church has to influence the provision of healthcare services as part of a basic human right” (Lategan, 2017).

Theology puts emphasis on aspirations, “it reflects on the meaning of life and how to live accordingly; it offers a vision of justice” (Colker, 1992). Ruth Colker highlights the significance of the authentic self in the quest for one’s aspirations:

First, the self is a deeply connected self since we are social beings. It makes no sense to describe the self as prosocial, entirely isolated from society, because, from (and before) birth, we are deeply connected to others. The distinction between self and other is illusory. We construct the society around us, as it constructs us. We are both other and self. Second, the self is ever changing; it is not a static entity. Since the self is ever changing and subject to our control, we seek to move it toward our aspirations for ourselves. Thus, as we move toward experiencing our aspirations for our authentic selves, we approach authenticity – we begin to realize our authentic selves. (1992:6).

Colker argues that this analysis “provides us with a tentative resolution of the feminist paradox of how we can be a socially constructed self and move beyond dominant social norms that

contribute to our oppression” (1992:6). This experience could help one to make their own decisions and choices about what to do with their body; women in need for abortion safe abortion services can claim their bodily autonomy once they make this realization. This can also be achieved once the Church plays a supportive role in the provision of healthcare for women. Laetus Lategan points out that:

Healthcare is to equip people to have a new relationship with themselves, fellow persons and the human ecology at large. The Church has to communicate this perspective through its sermons and practise and apply this new relationship through its pastoral care. Pastoral care is not to ease people outside the congregation but to assist them to confront and heal broken relationships (Lategan, 2017).

This role serves as a sign of love. In my view, people can feel more loved and whole when they feel they are part of the faith community than when they are excluded. Healthcare for women seeking access to safe abortion needs to start in the Church and not outside.

Love can be understood as an “intimate connectedness that we might experience” (Colker 1992:9). Aspiring for love could serve as a link between two communities that embrace this aspiration (Colker 1992:13). Religious leaders and women in need for safe abortion services in Malawi can be connected and move forward together if they share the same aspiration of love in the Church. Colker makes a strong argument in this regard:

The pro-life movement is often inconsistent in its desire to protect life. Similarly, pro-choice advocates may not sufficiently consider the value of pro-life arguments, falsely assuming that there is conflict between valuing fetal life and women’s life. We may be able to encourage dialogue on abortion if both sides of this polarized debate recognize their common interest in life and love. Criminalizing abortion when a woman faces an unintended pregnancy in a society that offers little to support of no support for women during their pregnancies or for mothers during their many years of child care is not, I will argue, a loving response to the problem of unintended pregnancies. Similarly, ignoring the trauma that some women may experience when they make an abortion decision is also not a loving response to the abortion issue. By seeking commonality rather than divisiveness on the abortion issue, we may see that some common ground is possible (1992:13).

One of the roles of the Church is to promote mercy in the community (Lategan, 2017). “Mercy (*hesed*” in Hebrew) refers to the all-encompassing care of people” (Lategan, 2017). This is what it means to show compassion. According to Colker:

Compassion requires a fully emphatic attitude where we try to understand another person’s life from their perspective... the strength of this conception of compassion is that it connects the self to other and makes it clear that compassion is an activity, not just an intellectual state... we should aspire to understand the life of anyone, no matter how he or she appears to be – we should aspire to be a society in which we can each understand each other across our differences (1992:14).

To be compassionate in the context of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill debate in Malawi is to carefully consider and understand the circumstances that lead a lot of women to make choices about having an abortion. The Church and members of the faith community should not be ignorant. In a case where a woman would like to terminate her pregnancy because of rape or incest, ignorance – from religious leaders and Church members – could possibly add more trauma and stigma on the woman. Compassion is one of the signs of “engagement with people, systems and society” (Lategan, 2017). Being compassionate towards women in need of access to safe abortion could play an important role in the process of reforming the abortion law in Malawi. Putting into light the many circumstances that contribute to women’s decisions to terminate pregnancy could arguably soften the stance of those who outrightly oppose abortion.

### **7.3. Suggestion for Further Research**

This research paper has focused on the context of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill debate in Malawi. It has also suggested ways of tackling matters concerning termination of pregnancy through Mark 5:25-34 in this context. Further studies in relation with this topic would touch on women’s struggle in negotiating religious faith and decisions to terminate pregnancy. I cannot know or understand how women feel when they are unable to terminate unwanted pregnancy because of their faith. Research building up on the topic of this paper would be an investigation of this. Women’s bodily autonomy when it comes to termination of pregnancy is what I would argue for if I was to conduct research in this regard. I would make

a point that religious beliefs should not impact women's decisions to terminate pregnancy whatsoever.

#### **7.4. Summary of Chapters**

This paper has seven chapters. The first chapter has provided the background of this research paper and introduced the Tripolar method of biblical hermeneutics as a frame through which this research is designed. African feminist biblical hermeneutics has been highlighted as the theoretical framework of this paper. The research questions and objectives of this paper have also been discussed. In the second chapter, focus has been on the context of the proposed termination of pregnancy bill debate in Malawi. This has involved setting out the provisions of the current abortion law in Malawi and the proposed bill. Some responses from political, medical and religious spheres in relation to the proposed bill have been provided. These responses – which take a rights-based approach – have been critiqued from a public healthcare and reproductive justice perspective.

The third chapter discussed the theoretical framework of this paper. In this case, African feminist biblical hermeneutics has been used in order to critique some of the religious responses towards termination of pregnancy provided in the second chapter. To be more specific, this chapter was a critique of the way biblical texts have been used to restrict women from having access to safe abortion services in Malawi. The biblical text of Mark 5:25-34 was the focus in chapter four. This involved a discussion of feminist readings of this text. A socio-historical and literary analysis of this text has also been done in this chapter. The literary analysis involved a detailed focus on some of the narrative elements that make up Mark 5:25-34. This was accompanied by my reflection on this text.

Ideo-theological resources for engaging with the termination of pregnancy context in Malawi have been discussed in chapter five. This has involved discussing African feminist biblical hermeneutic and narrative method as ideo-theological resources. Contextual Bible Study (CBS) and a rap song will additionally have been suggested as ideo-theological tools for empowerment, liberation and education. Notes and ideas for the CBS and rap song suggested in chapter five have been outlined in chapter six. This has involved a discussion about the construction of a CBS and creation of a rap song in the context of termination of pregnancy in

Malawi. Questions for the CBS reading process and the message the song would carry have been presented in this regard. Recommendations on how to interact with and support women struggling for a voice in the termination of pregnancy discourse positively have been suggested in the seventh chapter – this is the concluding chapter. Ideas for further research on the topic of this paper have also been shared in this chapter.

## **7.5. Conclusion**

PCFIB together with love and compassion have been recommended as approaches that people in Malawi can adopt when interacting with women who are in need for access to safe abortion services. A suggestion for further research on the topic of this paper has been made. Overall, this paper has pointed out the need for the rights-based approach to be dropped in favour of public healthcare and reproductive justice. This paper has found that there is need for people – especially some religious leaders – stop using biblical texts in ways that marginalize women by restricting them access to safe abortion services; we need to adopt approaches of reading biblical texts in ways that are life affirming.

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